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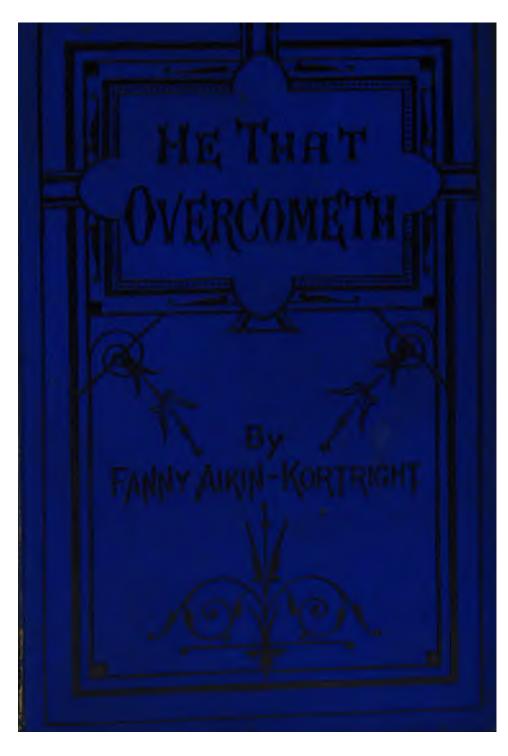
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HE THAT OVERCOMETH.

A Nobel.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

BY

FANNY AIKIN-KORTRIGHT.

Author of "Anne Sherwood;" "The Dean: or, The Popular Preacher;"
"Waiting for the Verdict;" "The Old, Old Story;" "Pro Aris et
Focis;" "A Little Lower than the Angels;" &c.



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ALL MY DEAR SISTERS

THESE VOLUMES ARE INSCRIBED,

AS A

TOKEN OF GRATEFUL LOVE.

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PREFACE.

The kind reader is begged to take this tale as it is meant to be, no ambitious attempt at a novel, only a simple story of homely lives. One point of interest attached to the narrative, is that its plan was suggested to the writer, some ten years ago, by her generous adviser and encourager, the late Bulwer Lytton.

FANNY AIKIN-KORTRIGHT.

Eldon House, Kensington Square, April, 1876.

HE THAT OVERCOMETH.

PART THE FIRST.

CHAPTER I.

CHILDHOOD.

Ir seems but the other day that Guy Rolfe and I were chasing butterflies in the fields, at Harford. My father was a country doctor, with a large but not lucrative practice. Guy was the son of a lawyer, similarly situated.

Each of us was an only child, with no great expectations, however; at least, none were entertained for us, for of ourselves we looked forward about as much as a couple of robins would have done.

One thing, however, I saw dimly in the future,

that I was to be Guy's wife. Now Guy saw no such vision, and only found in me a little creature who was born to sew up his ball when it burst, to make ugly flies for his fishing, and to listen to long, wonderful stories of his boyish adventures in nutting, or black-berrying days.

I am afraid manhood is sometimes selfish, even in its dawn!

Woman, it seems to me now, is little more to man than the puppet of his pleasure, or—the serf to wait on his footsteps! In the first character, he loves her, "as a man is able;" in the second, he bears with her affectionate assiduities, and is very proud of the vast merit that can call forth such devotion.

Poor, weak humanity! Weak man! Weak woman! but thus was it when earth was in the morning of young life; thus is it, in this last half of the iron nineteenth century, we are not better than our fathers.

"I like you to be with me, Rachel," said Guy, one day.

- "Do you, Guy!" I exclaimed, with a conscious little blush; "that is very kind, very kind indeed!"
- "Yes, I do like you to be with me; you are a neat-handed little thing, and you know there are so many things that a boy can't do for himself, hang it! and that a girl can do for him. Then my mother is always busy, she says, and won't stop her work to make me a butterfly net, or—"
- "Oh! so you like me to be with you, Guy, that I may do things for you?"
- "Yes, just so, and I am sure you like doing them," said the youth of eleven years, making the sort of motion that a young man makes when he pulls up his shirt collar; "now don't you really like to be at work for me, Rachel?"
- "I think I do," answered poor little simple Rachel.
 - "You only think, Rachel?"
 - "Oh, no, I am sure; quite sure, Guy."
- "Well, be a good girl, and you shall do all I want. Now, just run and find me a bit of twine;

good, thick twine, do you hear?" said the miniature man.

Fifteen years later, he asked me to do something for him, and I said "yes," and I did his will, but I don't think I added that I liked it; no, I wanted to say that he was breaking my heart, but the words stuck in my throat, and I—

We were the same age, Guy and I; opposite neighbours from our very birth. Our fathers were, if not fast friends, old acquaintances, who as the doctor and lawyer must meet, argued on politics, sometimes played a game of chess, and grew a little warm on the Roundhead and Cavalier question.

Our mothers exchanged visits, and compared notes as to children and servants and linen, and one at least, constantly kept a huge telescope directed into her neighbour's house for the improvement of an inquiring mind.

Guy and I were much thrown together, of course; there were no boys living near my play-fellow, which was, perhaps, the reason that he condescended to associate with a girl.

CHAPTER II.

THE RESCUE.

Guy wanted to go fishing; I, in my ignorance, having read about fishermen's nets in the Bible, and knowing nothing of angling with rods, fancied that I was doing him good service by wielding an immense needle and mesh, and producing thereby a large twine net, of which the loops were not very even, and which took me two or three months to accomplish making. My reward was a little scornful laugh from Guy, at my want of knowledge of manly sports, as he proudly displayed a handsome rod which his father had brought him from town. I believe I was born to enjoy, for a very trifle has sometimes had the power to fill me with inexpressible

happiness. The mere presence for a few brief minutes of a beloved object has sufficed to render every minute of the day golden. A look, a smile of common-place kindness, such looks, such smiles as might fall on dozens of other people, would make my heart dance as on a sunbeam.

The glad note of the bird, a beautiful passing cloud, the breeze singing among the leafy trees, or curling the waters, any one of these has been through life more to me than a birthday suit of diamonds would be to a vain woman of the world.

But then, in proportion to this power of enjoyment, arising from trifling sources, has always been my keen capacity for suffering; my heart has felt like a poor bruised, wounded bird at a look or word of derision, even one of coldness, from a beloved object.

Ah, well I remember how I suffered; actually suffered when Guy laughed at my poor, awkward attempt at a fishing net! He threw it over my head, pretending it was a veil; then snatched it

off, and, stepping into it, attempted to walk as if in a sack.

Tears ran down my cheeks, and I fairly burst out sobbing. He was sorry then, and said what he could to console me, but I would not be comforted; it was not that my feeble efforts were derided, it was that my heart was misunderstood.

Guy went fishing with his grand new rod, and I went out to walk with my father's dog, a great Newfoundland as big myself, or bigger.

Of course we took quite a contrary direction to the angler, and every now and then I threw my arms round the neck of Brutus, assuring him and myself that I wanted no other playmate and companion, and that he was nearer and dearer to me than any other could possibly be.

But Brutus and I made some mistake in our road, and finally came pretty near the spot where Guy sat with all the gravity of an experienced angler, dropping his line in the stream.

It was a beautiful scene; the river was not broad, but the banks were richly wooded with

overhanging trees; hill after hill rose in the distance, till the farthest off mingled with the purple and golden clouds of the sun-set. Not a habitation was in sight, not a wreath of smoke rose from the town that lay not far distant, but nearly hidden from us by the intervening screen of green woods. There was not a ripple on the water; the only human being in sight was the beautiful boy, with a mass of golden curls, lost in thought as he bent over the stream. Oh, he was very beautiful! I have often thought since how proud his mother must have been of him in those days of happy, bright childhood, ere care had dimmed his fair eyes, stolen the brightness from his cheek, and traced lines on his smooth brow. But I was not thinking of all this then; no, I was thinking about the unfortunate net, and wondering whether Guy had forgotten it. I hoped he had. I knew I could never bear to hear it spoken of again, and that the recollection of my great disappointment would always be a bitter mortification to me.

But while I, poor silly child, like many a child of older growth, was distressing myself about a trifle, a real misfortune arose. The little angler dropt his precious rod into the stream, darted forward instinctively to recover his treasure, and fell into the river; in a moment, ere I could utter a word or sound, the waters had closed over the bright head. I can hear the child's cry still ringing in my ears!

I was speechless with terror; I looked round in vain for help, I was too terrified to call for assistance; had I been able to do so, it would have been in vain, no human being was near.

Suddenly Heaven inspired me with a blessed thought; I pointed my trembling hand to the spot where my playmate had disappeared, and gasped out "Fetch! fetch! Brutus!"

The noble animal caught my meaning, and plunged into the river. It was all the work of a minute, though it seemed infinitely long. Soon my faithful dog laid the half-drowned boy at my feet. I was too happy, not to forget our little

quarrel, too happy not to show him my joy at his preservation.

As for Guy, fright, cold and numbness effectually drove away all affectation of manliness; we were soon laying our heads together as to how Mrs. Rolfe was to be pacified on the subject of the spoilt suit of clothes; finally we agreed that Guy should go home with me to my mother, who was, I knew, too good a Samaritan not to make him comfortable by drying his clothes and restoring them to some sort of order, before the sterner parent should discover her son's delinquency.

- "Ah Rachel!" said Guy, "I wish your mother were my mother! that I do! And I wish that I hadn't laughed at that nice net you made me! I'll never do it again! there—never."
- "No, Guy," said I, "you'll never laugh at it again, for I've burnt it!"
 - " Burnt it?"
- "Of course, I knew it would make me unhappy all my life, whenever I looked at it, so I burnt it."

- "I am so sorry, Rachel, more sorry than I can tell, and you have saved my life for me, and I didn't deserve it, that I didn't."
- "No, Guy, it was Brutus saved your life, but oh, don't I wish I were Brutus!"

CHAPTER III.

GUY'S FIRST LOVE.

CHILDHOOD glided away; Guy and I were eightteen, our birthdays fell in the same month, on the very same day. We had continued great friends, though less of our time was spent together, for Guy was writing in his father's office, I frequently busy, helping my mother in household matters.

Guy was very kind to me, with a brotherly sort of goodness, ready to do anything for me; to me he always came with his little troubles and confidences, and secrets and wants; sometimes it was only a cravat to hem, or gloves to mend; his mother did not like work.

I wrote a tolerable hand they said, more like that of a young man than a girl's writing. When

Guy was pressed with work, I helped to copy page after page of law papers, and found that work pleasant, because it was for him. He did not ask me then if I liked my occupation, I think he knew I did.

I could not help observing though, that when we were out in company, Guy rather avoided me, than otherwise, I could not tell why; I have since thought it was for fear he should be supposed to be paying attention to a plain girl.

I loved Guy with more than the love of fifty sisters, but I was too innocent to understand the nature of my own feelings; an accident revealed them to me ere long.

I was sitting with my work one evening in the garden behind our house, and as I plied my busy needle I was thinking—of what could I be thinking but of Guy Rolfe! when he suddenly stood before me with a bright, smiling face, and a heightened colour.

I felt my face and neck suffused with crimson when he approached, but he did not see it; he looked at me, but he did not see me. Poor boy!

How could he? He had come to make me the confidence of his first love story. A new and glorious world had opened for his young heart; he was dazzled and giddy with the unaccustomed light that had streamed in on his soul. I had long unconsciously wandered in that enchanted world, and now I awoke, and knew it.

Years have passed since that day; oh, how many! but I still distinctly feel the sharp pain, real physical pain, that his words sent through my heart, when he talked to me of Julia Darrel.

He was never weary of dilating on her beautiful eyes.

I do not think I was very wicked then. I conceived no distike to my rival; no anger against Guy. I only felt as if I should die as he stood beside me; I almost wished I might, but I pressed both my hands on my heart to still its beating, and tried to listen with smiling attention.

Guy continued his story. He "had loved Julia long, at least several months; he had not spoken to her yet of love, but he hoped, he

believed, she liked him. They were both poor; they might have to wait for years, but love and hope would give wings to time!"

Hope! the word smote through me; what had I to do with hope! Yet it was early to have done with it for ever.

Sorrow does not kill, else I had died that day. Perhaps no sorrow is eternal; we think each one is to be so when first it comes to us, and as it stalks up our cowardly hearts faint within us, but as time passes we grow accustomed to the spectre, or our hearts grow numbed, at last they die, and we are at rest.

But the first real shock is horrible to the young; suffering so new, so untried, is abhorrent to their nature; in after years grief is a familiar guest; we take it into our bosoms, fold our mantles above, and only ask that none may know it is there.

How long Guy talked of Julia I cannot tell; it seemed an age. The moon rose above us, and found him still dilating eloquently on his love; I still listening, or seeming to listen.

My father's voice, in rather serious accents, smote on my ear—

"Young people, this is not an hour for moonlight walks! Come in, Rachel; what are you talking about?"

"We are talking of love, Mr. Arden," said Guy, boldly.

"Then I would advise you to talk of, and make an income first, young man. Put no nonsense in Rachel's head, if you please; there is quite enough in it already; she put a shirt sleeve in for me, wrong side out, this morning."

Guy laughed merrily. I wept tears I did not dare to show.

My mother laid her hand on mine, and, by the tender pressure she made there, I felt she understood and sympathised with me.

Guy bade us a hasty good-night, and departed, still laughing at what he called my father's "ludicrous mistake." Oh, the ludicrous mistake was all mine, but its fruits were bitter, Heaven knows!

CHAPTER IV.

A LONELY LOVE.

Warrord was a little place; one of those little places that partake of town and country, or yet more, mingle town and village. The principal street, perhaps the only one deserving the name, was built up a hill side; the houses were irregular, which made them all the more picturesque; they were clean and white, with every here and there creeping plants spotting their surface, or even trees peeping out between them.

Fashions very slowly travelled to Warford. The parson were a shabby coat without shame, and the doctor stood still to gossip with the barber's wife, without degradation.

The lawyer's office was so directly opposite

our house, that from our upper windows we could look down upon the spot where his solitary clerk was seated on a high stool, working hour after hour.

The garret of our house had been a terrible spot to me in my childhood; my imagination had peopled it with something little short of hobgoblins, and they might well have played at hide-and-seek among the superannuated pieces of furniture which were there crowded, together with empty boxes, hampers, &c. But, now, oft and again I stole up to the old scene of affright to look at the view from the window.

And that view was worth the ascent, it was beautiful, taking in beyond the quiet little town, a wide extent of undulating meadow-land, with wood and water, and in the far distance a line of blue hills against the western sky.

I looked at the beauty of silent nature, and then at the fair children playing in the sunshine of the neighbours' gardens, the silver-headed old man bending over his staff as he toiled up the hilly street, and then my eye wandered to the curly-headed youth opposite, working truly, but stopping every now and then to indulge golden dreams. Each and all of these things were beautiful in their kind, and I wondered was I the only thing in creation that God had made destitute of beauty, which is another name for love.

Sometimes I thought of this with intense pain, sometimes with resignation, but after I had heard the story of Guy's love, it seemed to me no matter what I was. I was nothing to him, let me then continue to be nothing to all others; what matter what they thought of me!

I gave up my lonely journeys to the garret, or I went up very rarely to look on the sunset, and think how long it might be to my own.

How ignorant was I in my young grief! Surely, none had ever been so tried! and the very pillars of the world were giving way, and everything falling into ruins, because an insignificant handsome youth was—false! Yet not false, as he had never professed anything to me, beyond

his willingness to indulge me, by allowing me to work for, and wait upon him!

His fancy was fixed upon a pretty little rose with thorns all round the green stem, thorns that might sting him, and the flax that would have warmed, and clothed, and comforted, was trampled upon and despised!

Oh selfish youth! more selfish love!

I could only see, only feel my mortified and wounded affections; shame was upon my face; what shame can surpass that of a woman who has loved, unsought, unanswered; can conscious guilt be worse? Alas, is it not a step towards guilt? a sin against womanly modesty! I would not say it of another; I feel it of myself. I was lost in selfish sorrow and regret, for the uprooting of my little paradise, the overthrowing of my fairy palace of thought, the withering of my gourd; like Jonah's, it had sprung up in a night of moonlight and stars, and as quickly it had withered!

If I could only forget! forget so as not to feel

ashamed to meet my own thoughts in solitude, forget so that the reflection of my face in the glass might not always be a reminder that I had stretched forth my hand to gather the royal rose of love, that grows only in kingly gardens for the beautiful, not waiting to be plucked by their hands; no, falling as an offering at their feet, too often to be trampled upon by them. If I could only have turned away my eyes from myself, if I could have thought of the sorrows of others—and sorrow was rife around me.

There was the poor widow in the lane, whose husband, a bricklayer, had fallen from the scaffolding, and been killed on the spot; she and her desolate children were weeping, she for the dead—they for bread.

There was fever in a neighbouring cottage: three fair children lay cold and white in death, cold and white as the snow-drops that would grow on their graves, and be watered by a mother's tears. There was an honest carpenter, whose faithless wife had left him, to walk in silk attire by the

side of a rich man. All this was talked of around me, and seemed very sad, but my own little trumpery grief seemed to me much greater. Oh! how often have I thought since, if the fancy-stricken, love-sick maiden would but arise from her dreams and labour earnestly for God and man, how would she be dignified and glorified, instead of debased and humbled. Yes, thus have I thought, but I have sat still and hugged my silly sadness and done nothing!

Nay, I am still sitting under the willow I planted myself, and lamenting!

I will tell my brief heart-history, perhaps the load will fall from my spirit, with the words from my lips, and having laid down my burden, who knows but that the now impotent woman may arise and walk in the busy highway of life, and labor therein with honor and happiness.

Reader! not my one partial reader; and surely every poor scribbler has such at least; no, severe reader, that readest not to be "pleased, you know not why, and care not wherefore," but to dissect and prove, thou wilt reproach me for talking ever of love! harping on the one chord so long played upon that it has grown dissonant, but how can I do otherwise? Did I not say I was going to write the history of a woman's heart, and that history is love? What has she between the cradle and the grave but love, at least if she be a true woman, not cast in the heroic mould, born a brave, bold heart that can struggle and conquer on the battle-field of life, like a man. To a true woman, love tells her whole story, it is her life, and her epitaph; if it be not thus, she has lived another life, not her own.

CHAPTER V.

JULIA DARREL.

I KEPT as far as I could from Guy's path and sight; as far as possible from the path and sight of others who might guess my folly, or read it in my tell-tale face, and deride or pity me. But sometimes I was constrained to go out; then people told me I looked thin and pale, and I grew red with vexation.

I met a white-haired old maid that lived in a vine-covered cottage near Warford; she was always bright and smiling and happy, and carried sunshine where she came; she tried to cast some on me as she passed, but I would not take it into my heart.

- "It is a beautiful, happy world!" said she, smiling.
 - "It may be so to you," I answered, bitterly.
- "It is," she answered, while a gleam of added light played over her placid face, "for God seems always smiling upon earth; His Father-hand strews stars in the darkest sky; scatters flowers on the most stony road!" She pressed my hand and passed on, adding—"but we must open our eyes to see the stars; we must stretch forth our hands to gather the flowers!"

"She lives alone!" I murmured, "loveless, joyless, it would seem, yet she looks happy; but how know I what her past has been; she must have lived once, and the light of life is still upon her face!"

Truly, she had lived, but it had been in the fires of affliction, as I learnt afterwards, and God had worked a miracle for her, as for the sainted women of old, and fiery flames had turned into blushing roses; the fire had forborne to scorch, and instead of that, the perfume of flowers was

around her. The time had not come when the sight of such a face, of such a life, could comfort me. Has it come yet? I fear not.

I was wandering down a lane, where the hedges were high, and green branches laden with honeysuckles swept my cheek as I passed. I thought I was quite alone, and shed a shower of stormy tears. Some steps approached. What was my confusion when I found myself confronted with Guy and Miss Darrel.

She looked curiously at me, or I thought she did. I could have wished to sink into the earth. Guy raised his hat; Julia smiled.

- "You have lost your pet bird, I dare say?" said she, with a little laugh.
- "Less than that," I answered, mockingly, some flowers in my garden are withered."
- "You silly child!" interposed Guy, in his old, brotherly tone, "I thought at least that Brutus was dead; the brave old Brutus that saved my life, and now is dying of old age."
- "No," said I, "Brutus has not left me; he is too faithful to leave me yet."

"I will come and scold you to-morrow, sister Rachel," said Guy, smiling kindly, "Julia will come with me; she is prepared to love you."

Julia Darrel was but a slight acquaintance of mine; henceforth we must become intimate friends, and, no doubt, ere long I should be the depository of all her tender secrets, besides listening to the glowing romance of the fond lover.

I wonder whether such a thing could exist, as a true and tender friendship between two women whose heart's incense rose before the altar of the same idol! I have read of such things in books, but then books are not all true, as I used to fancy them, and women are not angels walking through earth with snowy garments that no mire can defile. How beautiful life would be if they were, and if they could all carry unfading lilies and soothing balms in their hands. Guy and his love went by, and I went home to gaze on the withered flowers in my heart's garden, for I had told the truth to Julia Darrel.

Guy was, as I have said, a lawyer's clerk, and worked rather hard, but, the lawyer being his father, was probably no hard task master, but I thought he was, and, in those days the hero of my heart's romance appeared to my imagination a misunderstood genius, perhaps rather an enchanted prince, set to sordid drudgery by some cruel sorcerer, his mind seemed so far above his work!

His mind! I wonder whether Guy possessed a mind, properly so called; perhaps not.

Let me tell myself the truth. My hero was no better, no higher, no greater, than any other girl's hero at whom I had privately laughed, and wondered at her taste; Mary Jenkinson's lover for instance, but then he was little and had red hair.

I loved Guy not for his goodness, or his talents, but just a little for his fair face and golden curls, more still from the close fellowship and intercourse of years, more than all most likely I loved him for very love's sake, the best excuse of all.

Yet I know that if I had gone out into the world, and seen others, seen some such men as one reads of in books—not in romances, or poems I mean, but in the histories of great men who have toiled and striven for the good and the glory of mankind—I should have loved one of them.

I had heard of the ocean, but I did not realize what. I had never seen: a bright, sparkling stream flowed by my life, and its sweet song charmed my ear; I found no image of mine reflected in the waters, but it was too late, I had sat down on the banks of the river, and I ceased to dream of an ocean whose shores faded, faded away from me like a vision.

I could not dissect my heart then, now I can take it in my hand and pitilessly search into its most secret chamber, and question it of its follies, its weakness, and its sins.

CHAPTER VI.

JULIA DARREL.

JULIA came to see me, grew very fond of me, indeed quite confidential, and as I dreaded, I had to listen to the history of her love; she told it over and over again, each time with some added incident she had forgotton to relate.

Sometimes she spoke of a book Guy had lent her, but which she had not read; sometimes it was a flower he had given her, which she had not worn. "He was not her first love," and she sighed as she made the confession. "No, her first love was a soldier, he had gone to Iudia, he was poor, she would have had to wait for him, ever so long, what use was there in waiting? youth goes so soon!" "The soldier-lover might come back and claim her some day, and then," here she laughed aloud, "it would be such fun, he would find her, perhaps, married!"

- "To Guy!" I suggested.
- "Yes, to Guy, or-some one else!"
- "Some one else!" I exclaimed, involuntarily.
- "Yes, don't you know there's many a slip between the cup and the lip? There are times when I don't feel sure that I love Guy at all. Ah, you look astonished and frightened. I suppose you think every one is to worship your hero!"
- "No! no!" I exclaimed energetically, and my "no" was very sincere, for I would much rather he had been left to my own worship.
- "Well," continued Julia, "the truth of the matter is this, I should never have thought of him, only I saw somebody else was trying very hard for him, and—now, don't get red, I don't mean you, you're out of the question, and quite made for a sober old maid. No, it was Lucy; I vowed she should never have him, so the next time we

met, it was at a little pic-nic, I made Guy propose, for fun!"

- "Propose marriage for fun!"
- "Why not? Should one's wedding be like one's funeral? If so, the bride might dress in black crape, the bridesmaids in paramatta! I am very fond of him, now, of course, and all that sort of thing."
 - "And so you—you actually made Guy propose."
- "Why not? I'll tell you how I did it. Lucy was casting such dying glances at him, I saw he was beginning to notice her; men are so soon caught by their vanity, a man can seldom resist a woman who seems to like him. The women that are proud and self-respectful as they call it, and suppress their feelings, never make good matches."
- "You, however, don't seem to have suppressed your feelings!"
- "Dear me, no, I soon let Guy know what a poor thing Lucy was, by drawing her out. Then I asked his opinion on two or three subjects

about which he knew no more than I, and then—I gave him a few glances like this!"

"For shame! for shame!" I cried, "you would not, could not have dared, if you had really loved him!"

"What should you know of love?" said Julia, lightly, yet I thought she was curiously seeking an answer in my face, and there was some earnest in her seeming jest.

I felt that I was growing red and angry, but Guy's entrance interrupted the conversation, and Julia turned to him, with that sort of dependant fondness, which appeals most to a man's feelings. "Rachel has been lecturing me, dear Guy, she is very wise and good I daresay, and I am only a poor, giddy, little thing, but you won't have me lectured, will you?"

"No, no," said Guy, fondly caressing her shining curls, "my darling shan't be teazed," and at me he looked rather reproachfully.

Was it fancy? Surely not, but even while her lover's hand lay in benediction on her head,

Julia shot a glance at me from under her long lashes, a glance of triumph which said—" See what I can do with him! See what I could do with any man!" Oh, those soft brown eyes that give a side glance, and look down; how they can one moment thrill through a man's heart; the next stab a sister's!

- "Does blue or pink become me most?" asked Julia.
 - "Why, dearest?" said Guy.
- "Oh, I was thinking of my new bonnet for the Flower Show."
 - " I shall not be able to go, darling."
 - "Oh, but you must!"
- " My father says Richardson v. Tomlinson is coming on; what can I do?"
- "Well, I suppose, you must give up Guy, but its very hard."
- "Very hard, indeed," said Guy, "that you should be deprived of going; confound that case!"

Julia started; was it the vehement language

of her lover, or was it at the idea of losing a pleasure trip; I wonder.

- "But does blue or pink suit me best?"
- "Both, both, dearest."
- "Nonsense! how can both suit me best! What do you say, Rachel?"
 - "I-oh, I am no judge of colours!"
 - "Now, do tell me!"
 - "Well, then, blue, I think."
- "Oh, you mean I have too much colour! Have I too much, Guy?"
- "No, one shade less would be destruction to God's fairest work."
 - "Then, why should I not wear pink?"
- "Why, indeed, should she not?" repeated Guy, with a tone of appeal.
- "Oh, I know nothing about it," said I, impatient of the subject.
- "Rachel is vexed with me; I am sure she is vexed!" said Julia, with one of her most helpless and appealing looks; "I dare say I must seem a poor, silly trifler to her; she is so wise!"

Even then I could read a mocking triumph in her eyes; she had, perhaps, read my secret heart; perhaps she knew I had loved Guy, and so she had won him to snatch my one chance of happiness from me! and of me she was making her pastime, of me and my secret suffering; sometimes giving a great stab; sometimes a little tiny sting, but always striking home.

"Wisdom does not consist in moroseness," said Guy, "if you are a trifler, my Julia, be one still, for no character could be as charming in my eyes as yours. If you were grave, and always bringing out moral reflections, I should not love you. Nothing could be so dreadful to me as philosophy in petticoats."

Julia smiled on him most sweetly, yet in her heart she was mocking, but she loved him in a manner, though she had lightly won him for her vanity, and might lightly part with him for her caprice. "Beautiful April" she liked to be called, and beautiful April she was. It seems to me, that if I were a man, I should not love a

woman wholly for her fair face; I should want to feel that the heart beside me was a noble heart, capable of beating with something like a heroic pulse, and ready to live or die for love, truth, and honour!

But what romance is this? Have I myself aimed so high? Where is the heroic idol of my worship? Is it of tried gold? or, is it of the earth, earthy? fit only for the fate of the potter's clay vessels!

CHAPTER VII.

A LOVERS' QUARREL.

ONCE more in the little garden where I had so often lingered at sunset with Guy, furtively stealing a timid glance at his pleasant face, while rosy light played on his curly head. The sun had set, and the risen moon was turning all the flowers, by a wonderful miracle, into lilies.

I was alone; my father had gone to London on business; my mother was at a sick neighbour's.

My only companions were my foolish little dreams, momentous to me; how insignificant to others!

A shadow broke on the white light; who could it be? No one had stood beside me in that path since the evening on which Guy had talked to me of something that had led to what he called "a ludicrous mistake."

I started at finding someone near, still more when I saw Guy, and felt him touch my arm. "Rachel!" his voice shook with agitation.

- "Guy! what—what is it?" I feared some real misfortune, feared it so much that I forgot I had no right to ask, or to receive Guy's confidence.
 - "Rachel, she has been to that flower show."
 - "Is that all, Guy?"
- "All, do you call it? An engaged woman hanging all day long on a strange fellow's arm! I could shoot him and myself too!"
 - "Guy! Guy!"
- "Don't moralize! don't lecture me, Rachel! I am nearly mad, I tell you. Fool! fool that I was, to suspect nothing!"
- "But Miss Darrel surely did not tell you she was going?"
- "No, she was too cunning for that! Mrs. Rose, the milliner, let it out by accident."

"Oh, Guy!"

"There you go again, Rachel! you think I have been mean enough to question the woman. No, I went into her shop, attracted by some foolish flowers in the window, moss-rose buds, that seemed made for her pretty face, not Mrs. Rose's, Julia's you know."

"Well, Guy," and I sighed for very pity.

"Well, she told me, to make me prize my purchase more, that she had the evening before put a bunch of them in a bonnet for Miss Darrel, to wear at the flower-show, and she looked lovely in it, as she went by, with her mamma and Captain Bretton."

"And no one else told you, Guy?"

"Was not that enough? I'll have an explanation this very night when she returns (they're not back yet), and then I'll bid her farewell for ever."

Truly women are not angels! The very words that anguish wrung from Guy, made my heart beat with tumultuous pleasure; but as I looked on his agitated face, pity, honour, and conscience drove away the unworthy feeling, and I forced myself to say, "It may be all false, Guy; you have no right to condemn Julia unheard."

- "But I have been to the house, to take her for our usual evening's walk, and found her out still, as I might have known she would be!"
 - "What does that prove?"
 - "Everything, I will go and meet them!"
- "Not to-night, Guy! I beseech you not tonight, wait till to-morrow, till you are cool!"
- "Till I am cool! Then I must wait till my hair is as white as snow, and my heart as cold. Rachel, you don't know what a storm within means; you might as well ask a house in flames to be cool."
- "But, Guy, you will frighten Julia with your vehemence, perhaps even make her ill." He started at these words; he must have loved her deeply, for his whole being seemed moved; his eyes filled with tears. Poor Guy! he grew quiet as a lamb ere he spoke again.

"Rachel, you don't know how I love that girl? if she is false to me, all my future life is a blank, a mere blank!"

"But be reasonable, Guy, even if Julia did go to the flower-show, even if Captain Bretton attended her there, you had previously said you could not go, and her mother was surely sufficient protection!"

"All very good, Rachel, but you don't know, you can't tell, what love is!"

"Ah Brutus! good fellow!" he cried, as my dog came fawning upon him, "you little know that when your mistress and you pulled me out of the river, you had done more kindly to leave me there, perhaps!"

I succeeded at last in making Guy promise that he would seek no explanation from Julia till the next day; that seemed a great deal gained. I remained up in the old garret for hours that night, watching the light that burnt in Guy's room, and the restless shadow that moved on his blind, as he paced to and fro in the chamber.

Alas, he was making acquaintance with his first great sorrow—I had long known mine.

I waited the next day with anxiety that was almost dread. I need not have feared so much. Guy had said that he would come and tell me the result of his next interview with Julia, but he forgot to come!

I met the lovers walking together, a few evenings afterwards quite lovingly; and later passed Guy in the road; he pressed my hand and whispered, "It was all right after all! Julia never went to the show, never saw Captain Bretton that day. She was shut up all the time at home, with a bad head-ache. I wanted to go and ask that woman Rose, what she meant by her scandalous lies, but Julia wouldn't let me, she said it would make her talked about. If there's one sin blacker than another it is that awful love of gossip and slander! What a brute I was, to talk so ill of my poor darling! You should have seen her tears, Rachel!"

Thus blindly did Guy love and believe in Julia.

Darrel! and yet such a great love as this, can die and perish from earth like the commonest wild flower plucked from the hedge! If love were immortal, man would be a god, but time and chance must happen to that as to other fair things. Yet how, for awhile, we all believe in love's eternity! how unwillingly we at last say to it, "Dust thou art, and unto dust returnest!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A BROKEN LIFE.

Weeks, and even months, soon slip sway, while flowers bloom and branches are green, and hearts are young and happy. Even so, no doubt, time had slipped away for the lovers, perhaps too quickly. Guy looked supremely happy, when I chanced to meet him. Julia had a restless gaiety of manner, which to me seemed rather flippant than joyous, but then I was prejudiced against her. I tried hard, oh so hard, to like her, as one that would soon be a part of my brother Guy, and who was a pearl of precious price in his eyes. Now, when I think of her, I find that I could never have liked her, even had no feeling of jealousy blinded my eyes; our natures were so

opposed. I loved truth and she loved falsehood; yes, absolutely loved it, and really preferred a a crooked path to a straight road, even if the straight road would lead sooner to her object.

The —— regiment had been lately sent to quarters near Warford; the officers of course became the fashion, especially the handsome Captain Bretton.

Women naturally like handsome faces and a becoming uniform; but perhaps the best part of our natures is that which makes us instinctively bow down to the brave.

I wonder, if I had had a heart in my bosom, whether some brave soldier would have carried it away captive! There was something so new to us almost rustics of Warford, to hear of heroic adventures on the Russian soil, from whence "our own regiment," as we called it, had just returned.

All the young enthusiasts among us went nearly mad on the subject of military adventures, and more than one white Othello found an eagerly listening Desdemona for the story of his hairbreadth 'scapes.

The red-clad heroes were not new to Julia, her first love was a soldier, and I saw, though poor blind Guy could not see, that the presence of Captain Bretton brought a light to her eye, and a flush to her cheek, which her lover's presence never awoke; perhaps it was the renewal of old memories; perhaps the soldier's presence was to her as the echo of old strains of music, coming back familiarly. Yes, I saw that Julia really liked Captain Bretton, and was growing cold, if not even averse to Guy; but she lied skilfully with her tongue, and he loved her too well not to believe her, though he might wonder a little when, as autumn came round, Julia was obliged to discontinue her daily walks, which had been the great solace of his life when the toil of the day was over, and he could lure her for a long stroll.

Sometimes, too, her head ached, and she could not bear talking, and Guy knocked at her door in vain; he often turned away sad and disappointed, but he still believed in her.

Guy began to return to me, then, instinctively. He could talk to me of Julia; nobody else would be a patient listener. I might not be enthusiastic, but still I would let him talk of all his hopes and fears on the subject of his "sensitive plant!" Alas, how a looker-on at the pretty melo-dramas of life learns to despise the little plays and the little actors! One understands how the bitterest satirists are made when happy accident gives talent enough to help one apply the experience of life. If I had had the faculty of noting down vigorously the characters playing round me, even in that little rustic place, what a drama I could have made!

There was the fond, trusting, earnest lover, toiling hard at his calling that he might sooner claim his fair bride; the pretty coquette, half jesting, half serious, bound by solemn vows, even as much by permitted caresses to one man, yet thirsting for the admiration, perhaps for the

devoted love, of another—feigning, scheming, lying, yet adored all the while, and worshipped as holy purity and virtue itself.

Poor Guy slept and dreamed; I trembled for his awaking! At last it came.

Julia discovered that she had been quite mistaken in her vocation; that nature never meant her to settle down as the wife of a country lawyer—that profession was beyond every other obnoxious to her. She wished to see more of life; she had mistaken her heart, as well as her vocation, and, alas! alas! she could not help it! Probably that was true, she could not help it, and she said to her lover, as he afterwards told me, "Dear Guy, be generous!"

- "What shall I do for you, dearest? Aught that man can accomplish, I will do; ask me things impossible, I will at least attempt them!"
 - "Release me from my promise, then!"
 - "Your promise!" faltered Guy.
 - "Yes; I cannot be your wife!"
 - "What have I done, Julia?"

- " Nothing; nothing-but-"
- "You do not love me! I see it! I understand you—Captain Bretton is—"
- "He is nothing to me, nothing! but oh, Guy, be merciful!"
 - "What do you desire?"
- "I have told you, I cannot be your wife; I cannot settle down in this little place, with no one to see, no one to speak to!"
 - " Well, Julia!"
 - "You have not answered me, Guy!"
- "I will leave Warford if you like, Julia; change my profession if you will; I will do anything, be anything that pleases you!"
 - "No, no! it is not that."
 - "What then?"
 - " I cannot love you, Guy!"
- "Then every kiss you gave me was a lie; every smile was deception."

A loud knock interrupted the conversation. Julia snatched her hand from the convulsive clasp of her lover and rushed from the room. Guy followed, but only in time to hear the clank of a sword, ere the door of an opposite room closed on his faithless love and his rival.

Guy walked from the house; walked blindly on in wild haste. I passed him, and saw his distracted state. I spoke to him, but he did not hear me. I believe he did not even see me.

"Brother Guy!" I repeated, but there was no answer. I laid my hand on his arm, he started and would have left me, but I boldly put my arm through his, and led him into our house.

"Mother," said I, "poor Guy is ill; I am sure he is ill."

"Then he had better ask Miss Julia Darr el to nurse him!" said my mother, with some asperity.

The words seemed to sting Guy; he kept silence, but turned, and was departing.

"No, no, you must not go, Guy," said I, and I led him almost forcibly into the little garden,

and to the summer-house, wherein we had often sat together.

Guy sat down, and slowly passed his hand over his forehead, as if to remember something; the work of years seemed to have been done in a few minutes, leaving deep lines in his face. A woman betrayed and forsaken sheds tears and is relieved; she has the sympathy of all honest hearts, and the villain who has won her faith, and then left her in sorrow and darkness, is perhaps shunned, scouted, and despised; but the traitress who wins a heart for sport, who makes an honest man propose to her "for fun," and when the game is played out, abandons him, goes scatheless to make new victims!

Guy showed a power of will, a strength of purpose I had not looked for in him. The first day he seemed to give up to silent anguish; the next day it was all over, as far as outward expression went; but his whole aspect was changed; he became quiet and serious, went through his daily routine of dry labour, and when it was over

he came and sat beside me in silence, watching my work, or seeming to listen to the book I read aloud.

Guy had no mother; she who bore that name to him was hard, selfish, and grasping; she had no words, nor looks of sympathy and tenderness, but a cold heart and a sharp tongue. My mother, on the contrary, was all tenderness and charity. For a time she had almost unconsciously resented Guy's having passed by her child with indifference; it was a natural, motherly feeling, but Guy the happy, prosperous lover, a little proud and insolent in his happiness, was one, and Guy the injured and betrayed was quite another, and had a right to sympathy.

I wonder now whether all the kindness I lavished on Guy in those days was purely disinterested! The commerce of the world makes one suspect even one's own motives, yet I verily do believe that I had no thought but soothing his sadness.

Still, when I look back I almost think that I

might have caught that poor crushed heart in the rebound. It seems to me had I stretched out my hand ever so little, Guy's would have clasped mine, and we might have been happy! But I did not do it even in thought, and our two solemn lives went on side by side, calmly, quietly, in their course, but separate still.

"On the first day of April, at St. Alphege, Captain Herbert Bretton, — Regiment, to Julia, the only daughter of Hugh Darrel, Esq."

Guy read this aloud, with a calm, unfaltering voice, but his face was ghastly white, and I knew his love was not dead yet; it died a slow, slow death. Only when the snow was on the trees, and old men and women drew round the fire to warm their withered hands, did Guy's face smile; but never would it again wear the light his joyous youth had known.

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT RACHEL THOUGHT.

Our little household was a simple and usually a very quiet one; there were no stirring events.

Our means were so small, that we had not the excitement of a visiting list, and even a change of dress was not frequent among us.

I think we were always decent and even neat in attire, but no "darling" new bonnet, or moiré dresses came to stir our pulses. (I am talking of my mother and myself.) My bonnets were trimmed by my own hands; my dresses were often of dull, dark colours, for economy sake.

Julia Darrel said I was a dowdy; I dare say she was right. I never looked much in the glass,

but I see myself this minute, just as I was then, in those old Warford days, a thin, dark, pale girl of middle height, brown hair plainly banded. I wore a brown merino dress in winter, a lavender muslin in summer, only relieved by a white linen collar.

My eyes were grey, greenish grey, Guy said; my features small and irregular, only my forehead was large, large enough for thought, too large for beauty. My mother said I was not plain; my father looked on my face with complacency. I—well I tried not to think about it at all, but I kept as far as I could out of notice.

Now, I have arrived at the conclusion, that the secret of a woman's success, at least the success at which most women aim, is a well-sustained self-assertion! If I had had vanity, or even plenty of assurance, and had given myself out for a beauty, I dare say people would have believed, and called me one. I have seen this sort of thing done often since my younger days, and done with triumphant success.

I ought to have been a beauty, for my mother was really lovely; and even a pallid face, grey hair, and a wasted form did not efface her loveliness. Her features were delicate and regular, and over all was spread the charm of a refined nature. I think she had been formed for a higher sphere than Warford offered; she smiled when I told her so, and said—

"My ambition is fully satisfied this side of Heaven. I have spent twenty-five years in the closest intimacy with the whitest soul; that is a grand destiny, only second to the kingdom above, an education for that! I have been twenty-five years the wife of 'an honest man;' 'the noblest work of God.' I am happy, Rachel; quietly, calmly happy, and my heart has only two or three unfulfilled wishes."

I asked what those wishes were?

"I would exchange this little gossipping place for the quiet fields to which my heart sails forth often; I would see your dear father toil less, and sitting under the shadow of his own trees, instead of by the bed-side of his patients. But then the poor would miss him, and his heart would yearn to relieve the unfortunate; so I am content to wait God's time. Then if I could see you, my darling—"

- "A nun, mamma?" lasked.
- "No; but Guy's wife."

Ah! the words came forth involuntarily, my mother. Your tender nature could conceive nothing of the pang they gave me.

"His wife!" I repeated, as steadily as I could; "that could never be, mother. As you love me never say it, never even think it; I would rather die; yes, die, and leave you and him, and God's sunshine, and lie down in the grave to-day than—"

"My darling!" exclaimed my mother, "I have erred grievously; I trusted too much to my own foresight, I thought you two would grow up like Paul and Virginia, side by side, with only one heart in two bosoms."

"Ah, mother! but they lived in the lonely

wilderness, and Virginia was fair, and Paul never saw a Julia Darrel to make him propose 'for fun.'"

- "But Julia is gone; her memory need not trouble you; he will appreciate and love you now."
- "No, no, he will not, and if he would, I would not have such love as he could give me."
 - "Then you wish it all over, Rachael?"
 - "What!" I cried, half frightened.
- "This foolish intimacy, which I have allowed, nay, encouraged!" said my mother.
 - "Over! Oh, no! no!" I exclaimed.
 - "You must not meet so often."
- "Mother, we must! Am I not his sister? his friend? Poor Guy! what could he do without me? But I will never, never think of him except as my brother."
- "And your life, your happiness will be sacrificed!"
- "No, mother, but I will truly be the Virginia to this Paul; if I forget myself, I cannot be unhappy!"

My mother shook her head; she could not believe in my reasoning, but, as I found afterwards, she had a latent hope that Guy would see the value of my heart, and that her dearest wish might yet be realised.

What happiness there must be in a mother's sanguine visions! I often think of that exquisite little French song, Près d'un berceau," in which a woman murmurs her dreams of the future, to her unconscious infant, and prophecies for him the most glowing destiny, seeing in him by turns the heroic leader of armies, the poet that shall stir all hearts, the eloquent priest that shall prepare happy souls for the kingdom of heaven!

I wonder whether God did not mean all women for the glory of motherhood; surely he did, when first he made this beautiful world. Only the little angels he sent out of heaven on to earth, were not meant to fall as the star of the morning fell, and if they had not fallen, then every mother would have had a halo round her, like the glory that beams round the Madonna's head.

I wonder whether the woman who has been childless here, will meet in heaven the little souls that should have been hers on earth, and whether God will let them comfort her, making their love part of her heaven when they call her "mother!"

What strange things one dreams sometimes of that great kingdom-come! Perhaps God lets us dream them, to throw by these visions a little sunshine into the valleys below, where yew trees seem planted so thickly, that they hide too much of the sunshine from our eyes.

So I will believe, I, lonely woman writing my own heart's history, I will believe that little winged cherubim will welcome me in at the pearly gates, call me "mother," and be my ministering spirits through eternity.

My mother's dreams for me, her only child, could not well help taking a happy, roseate hue; so she let me go on from day to day, receiving and comforting, and advising Guy; and Guy at last came to think of our house as his real home, of

my mother as his real mother, and of me—of me as his real sister.

He had no more love-stories to tell me; but sometimes when I saw that the light had gone out of his eyes, I almost wished that he had, though my jealous heart should break.

I was better then than I am now, and I so longed to see his old smile come back again, that I think I could have wished Julia Darrel's false-hood wiped out, and she once more walking by his side.

CHAPTER X.

PASSING AWAY.

Spring blossoms came out again, and summer roses followed, but I felt like one who has reached old age.

To see Guy's silent sorrow, the suppressed passion that rendered him so utterly unlike his old, impetuous self, had so strange an effect upon me, it seemed to sober me for ever. We met daily now, as in childhood, but were we the same beings? I think not.

The character of Guy was improved and elevated by trial; he had lost his trust in humanity, it is true, but he had gained in unselfishness; he might again be thoughtless, but he would never be self-trusting.

Julia Darrel, or rather Julia Bretton, was gone over the wide waters to India; we never mentioned her, but she was often in our thoughts.

I have not one doubt of her having regretted Guy; the moment an object was forbidden, or placed beyond her reach, it acquired a greater value in her eyes. Alas, we women have little to be proud of, between our little vanities and weaknesses, we are poor mortals! Now a lover to win, now a new-fashioned mantle to obtain, a breathless pursuit till both are attained, but how often the lover can be speedily rivalled, the mantle superseded!

Thank God for noble women, to wipe out the stain that unworthy sisters have left upon our names! Thank God, too, that life is not all sentimental love, and that high and holy duties sometimes come between us and the dreamy romance of our hearts! Thus did it happen with me.

I have said little of my father, yet he was a man who deserved his life to be chronicled in the golden book, wherein the angels write the names of good men. Quietly, silently, "he kept the even tenor of his way," and did good to all within his reach.

He was moderately prosperous, and might have been more so, but for his generous charity. He never allowed the poor to pay for his cares. Warford did not boast many people in easy circumstances, consequently his gains were not large.

But he was the very image of God's pity, and soothed the sufferings of a dumb creature, as tenderly as those of a human being.

How often we pour out to the dead the goblet that should have been offered to the living! I love my father now with an intense love, of which I was unconscious when he stood before me in life.

People said I was a good daughter, and praised me, as very dutiful, but how poor that duty must have been while my head was full of one absorbing thought; and oh! how divine love would be if it expanded instead of narrowing the heart! How cold and wretched was the duty that let me wait with my hands on my sick father, while my heart and soul were with Guy, even when it seemed to me that it was not so much love, as sympathy and pity which I felt for him.

The one image within me filled my heart so completely, that my eyes were blinded, my ears deaf to aught else. I could not see my father passing away to the company of the saints and angels, I could not hear the holy voices calling him through the hum of the day, through the dead silence of the long night, and yet they were calling, calling, quicker and louder day by day, hour by hour, as the hands went round the dial of the church clock; he heard them call, and well did he know their meaning. The pitcher was breaking at the fountain, the silver cord was loosening, but the golden bowl was still full of high generous thoughts, and till it shivered he would use them for the good of men. He knew that the pale spectre walked by his side, ready to strike at each moment, but to him he wore no horrible, nor tremendous aspect; he had not called him, for he was not weary of the green earth and the fair sky, but he met him with a placid smile, a little sadness perhaps, but no throb of coward fear, and he resolved to die as he had lived, working, a patient, brave man in death as in life.

At last, he laid his hand on his heart, and broke the truth to us, the sorrowing wife, the self-reproachful daughter. He had set his house in order; he calmly explained everything to us. We should not be rich when he was gone, but should have a modest competence, not enough to dazzle false friends, but amply sufficient for life's real wants. A few simple directions for our conduct, a few loving words to cheer our loneliness, and to point to the great hereafter, and then he laid his hand upon my head, in blessing, and bade me ever be to my mother all I had been to him. He thanked me, my dying father thanked me, for the cold lifeless duty I had shown him! then came the farewell between the two long-wedded

hearts, it was more looked than spoken. Great God! what must such a parting be! and how insignificant and puny did my great love and my great grief seem beside that overwhelming sorrow. Guy's name was mentioned; my father asked to see him; he came, but it was already too late. The dying man looked from him to me, from me to him again.

Guy changed colour, not so did I, for he was nothing to me in that moment; he read some meaning in the expiring eye; he took my hand, but I hastily snatched it from him. I could see but one object in life, and truly I poured out at the feet of the dead, the love that should have cheered the living; it was as the libations which the men of old poured out to their gods and heroes, as full and costly, perchance as useless and unnoticed.

And yet, may we not hope that they who walk with the dear Christ in the spirit land look down upon and listen to us here? The bands knit upon earth, are too strong to be broken in the eternal world, and the love carried up into heaven must increase and grow—a bud below, there, a great, tall palm!

They must feel, they must know the heart's incense as it mounts up to them, and their happiness must be increased even by earthly love.

Oh, ye departed! not lost, but gone before.

Father! gentle yet strong, quiet, yet energetic spirit; mother, true and tender, your love is yet around me, and is as a lamp to my path. Ye that feed among the lilies, drop some of heaven's balm from your full hands upon your child below, and draw her up to the great kingdom!

CHAPTER XL

ONE MORE YEAR GONE.

Warrord was its old self; yet some old faces had given way to the new ones. A fresh name was on the brass plate which had all through my life borne my father's name.

A fresh-coloured, rather good-looking young man was his successor; he had bought the practice, and had taken the house, which we did not care to live in, now that the windows were darkened; besides it was for the right of his interests that he should dwell there.

He, Mr. Vincent, made what we call "improvements," cut down a tree here, built a wall there, uprooted in one spot, planted in another,

made new windows, and as he was fond of sunshine, tore down the drooping ivy that shaded others.

Mr. Vincent was of an active spirit; he drove as fast to visit a patient who had a chronic cold, as he would have driven to the scene of a railway accident. He was always busy, bustling, full of coming achievements, big with new scientific discoveries; he was well intentioned, tolerably goodnatured, shrewd in business, and rather eager for worldly success; it was natural; he was young, hopeful, self-confident, he expected great things from life, and so far had never tasted a fair Sodom's apple, to find it ashes.

I took a dislike to the poor man, for no reason but that he filled my father's place, and was rather a noisy bustling person. Warford pronounced Mr. Vincent handsome, and I was the only girl in the place who did not hold that opinion. My mother and I lived in a cottage just outside the town.

In the first outburst of sorrow at our bereave-

ment, I did not calculate how I should feel on leaving Guy's neighbourhood; it was not till the first stunning effect of the blow had gone by, that I felt and knew the pain of separation from my life-long friend. Yet he came often to see us—almost daily—and we renewed our long talks in the garden, or he read aloud while I worked, and brought me all his trials, great and small, unless it were the trials of his heart; they might be great and a sore burden grievous to bear, but they were buried now, the gravestone was upon them, and a great seal was put upon it, whose impress was a cross.

Guy never referred to the strange, unspoken words that had passed between him and my father at the solemn death bed; sometimes I thought he tried to lead the conversation that way, but I shrank from the subject. Sometimes I thought if it meant anything that he would have taken me to his arms in tender compassion towards a dying parent, or it might be from pity for the unshared love he had perchance dis-

covered, but I was too proud for even Guy's pity. It was still much to have him with us so often, but I missed the old garret, in the old familiar house, from whence I had been wont to look down into the lawyer's dusty office, where the curly-headed youth sat at work. True, he was beside me now, but I could not unobserved watch every fluctuating light or shade sweeping over his face, and thus guess his thoughts. I had learnt to meet his eye quietly and calmly, and to talk composedly with him, as with a common friend, but I was ever fearful lest some unguarded look or tone should betray a deeper feeling than the quiet, sisterly regard I meant to show him. Sometimes Guy asked me to take a walk with him; the proposition was tempting, but I would not yield to it. Now, we almost always met in my mother's presence; she had no duties to call her away from me, and I felt each moment stolen that I took from her who had none but me.

Her sorrow had not been loud, but it was all Vol. 1.

the deeper for that, and I clave to her with a sort of despairing fondness.

If I had walked out with Guy, the gossips of Warford would have married us directly; I should have had the mortification of contradicting reports with a blushing cheek, which would have gone far to make them seem true, the greater mortification of seeing Guy forced to throw the shelter of his name over me to save me from contemptuous pity.

So instead of walking in the green lanes and fields, we stayed at home reading through the long evenings, while perchance our thoughts were wandering far away.

Mine, I think, were often in the spirit world, wondering, wondering what it was like; what made its chief joys and glories that no mortal eye has seen, but his who was caught up into the seventh heaven, I wondering how He looked that dwelt there now; whether His love was still with us.

Guy's fancy, I dare say, was wandering to the

land of the date and the palm, "where rivers wander o'er sands of gold," and there pursuing the fair, false image that had disappeared from our little world, to flaunt in the gorgeous Eastern scenes, and to enact the little Sultana, as women are wont to do in India.

Sometimes a beautiful passage in a book would fire my dormant fancy, and thrill through me, communicating a strange pleasure, which made me forget myself utterly.

"If much study were a weariness of the flesh in the days of Solomon," said Guy, abruptly, "what must it be now?"

"Oh, a great happiness and delight, Guy," I answered; "at least to the free unfettered spirit that can recognise and revel in true beauty, and grow rich in its golden treasury. If one were free from grief—"

"Rachel! what can you know of grief? Ah! forgive my selfish folly! I forgot! We are so apt to think our own sorrow the only one the sun smiles upon in mockery!"

He heaved a deep sigh as he spoke; was it for his own grief? or, was it for the tears that he saw brimming over my eyes?

He took my hand in his; he wiped my eyes tenderly; a passer-by would have said we were lovers; yet we were but friends. Ah, would that the hand clasped in his, had ever so slightly returned that clasp! Would that I had dared to steal one look towards him at that moment; it might have altered the history of two lives, but I did not, I dared not; our hands parted, and he was still only my brother Guy.

- "Mr. Vincent is a great nuisance!" said Guy.
- "Is he? poor man!"
- "' Poor man,' do you call him? He is as rich as Crœsus; rich in conceit and self-satisfaction; rich in plans; rich in patients; in profits they say! rich too in friends."
 - "But how does he annoy you, Guy?"
- "Partly by his eternal smile! They say he smiles on those newly ushered into the tender mercies of this wicked world, and smiles on those who are hurrying out of it; smiles in extracting a

tooth, or setting a leg. Rachel, the man who is for ever smiling is a false villain, or at least a selfish wretch."

"Oh, Guy! you once used to smile as often as Mr. Vincent does."

"I don't remember, but if so I was lying no doubt. To put the mildest construction on Vincent's smiles they must be to show his teeth. Then the hammer is always going in the man's house; one would fancy he had a new bride coming home every week, and that he was making preparations to receive her!"

- "Perhaps he has a bride coming home," said I.
- "What, every week?"
- "No; but shortly it may be."
- "Ah! you know something about it, Rachel."
- "I! what should I know, Guy?"
- "A great deal, perhaps?"
- "Not much, Guy; but it is natural he should marry; he is young, good looking, and prosperous."
 - "Is he all that?"
 - "Don't you think so, Guy?"

- "I never think of such nonsense, Rachel; but, of course, looks are everything to women!"
 - "And to men, Guy?"
- "Yes, when men are idiots, no doubt! But whom is this fellow going to marry?"
 - "I don't know."
 - "Truly you don't, Rachel?"
 - "No, indeed; I have never cared to ask."
 - "It is not you then, Rachel?"
 - "Guy!"
 - "Well, Rachel."
 - "You are unkind."
 - "Why, you will surely marry some day?"
 - "Never, Guy."
 - "Never, Rachel?"
- "No; there dwells not the man on this wide earth whose wife I would be, or if there does I have never seen him, probably never shall. Moreover, my life is my mother's; and I am not yet tired of my brother Guy!"

Guy looked at me enquiringly, but I turned the conversation to other matters, and he soon departed.

CHAPTER XII.

MRS. BELTON.

"So the secret is out," said the great gossip of Warford, bursting in on us in our quiet retreat; "the secret is out!"

The speaker was a lady by courtesy; that is a respectably born, tolerably-educated woman, accustomed to the amenities of life, only she had a vulgar soul, delighted in sensation, though she made it her boast that she never read novels; a pity she had not read them instead of making up little romances for herself (by the torture or confusion of her neighbours), out of their hearts and lives.

Mrs. Belton was an independent widow; she had not the excuse of being a disappointed old

maid, a being who may be sad from sorrow, or embittered by unmerited misfortune; no, she had no such excuse, but she was unhappy herself, and seemed anxious that no one should enjoy peace which she had failed to obtain.

- "The secret is out, Miss Arden," she repeated.
- "It has not reached us, however," said I, feeling little interest in the gossip of Warford; "I seldom hear of what is going on here."
- "Indeed!" she replied, with a little incredulous smile. "Well, I'll tell you presently when we are alone." She then glanced towards Guy, who was sitting in my father's easy chair, and resumed—"Dear, me! how much law business you must have! Mr. Rolfe is always here; I should have thought your affairs were settled long ago."
- "Mr. Rolfe is often here," said I, quietly, "for we are very old friends; we grew up together, and have always been—"
- "Paul and Virginia, of course. I know all about it; but now, my dear, you will have to be more circumspect, Mr. Vincent won't like it."

"Mr. Vincent!" I exclaimed, while Guy started from his chair, and let his book fall.

"Now don't look so innocent, child," continued Mrs. Belton; "men are very naughty, but really what they say of us women is true, we're very cunning indeed. By the by, you've heard the news, I suppose, about that dreadful flirt, Julia Darrel that was, Mrs. Bretton." She glanced side-ways at Guy as she spoke, and he grew very white with suppressed emotion. I saw that the hand which he rested on the table was clenched. I made no reply. "Such a life I hear she is leading at Calcutta, flirting with half-adozen officers. She will be in the divorce court some day."

Still I said nothing for some time. Presently I summoned courage to ask pretty firmly, "Mrs. Belton, why do you talk to me of Mr. Vincent?"

"Oh, pretty innocence! You deny what every one knows, I suppose?"

"I can deny nothing till I know what the assertion is."

- "You are not engaged to be married to Mr. Vincent, then?"
- "Good heavens! who dares say so?" I cried, indignantly.
- "You are fond of telling the news, Mrs. Belton," said Guy, "and of course it is pleasant to give information. I'd advise you, however, not to overwhelm Miss Arden with any more discoveries to-day, but to go through Warford and contradict this silly report of her marriage with Mr. Vincent; you can give me as your authority, if you please, as the family lawyer; you can add, if you will, that I as well as Miss Arden have stood your fire to-day, and after hearing of Mrs. Bretton's enormities, am still far from thinking of pistols."

He tried to laugh, but his cheeks and his very lips were white as ashes. I forgot my own vexation in his agitation.

Mrs Belton caught a glimpse of my mother in our little garden, and went out to join her, probably with the intention of teazing or astonishing her, or doing both.

- "Don't let this vulgar gossip distress you, Rachel," said Guy, drawing nearer to me.
- "No, no!" said I; "it is not that, though I cannot bear my name to be coupled with that man's."
- "I could have told you long ago, that it was so."
 - "Oh, Guy! and you told me nothing."
- "I thought there might be some truth in the report."
- "How could you think it!" and agitated by conflicting feelings, I wept foolish tears of which I felt ashamed.
- "Rachel! dear Rachel! can I say, or do nothing to comfort you?"
 - "Nothing, Guy! but I will leave Warford."
- "Leave Warford, Rachel! you would not surely leave me utterly lonely! What would become of me without you? Ah, there I am at my old selfishness again! But indeed it seems to me, that if you deserted me my very sun would go out."

Ah! I was all that to Guy, and yet our hearts, our lives were still to keep apart. Meanwhile, the bustling Doctor had heard that report had coupled our names together; to my great dismay he verified the gossip, and came wooing to me. I that had never had a lover in my life, never thought to have one! My mother did not like the match, Guy ridiculed and disliked the wooer, and I was only too glad to dismiss him with hasty thanks, that were scarcely civil enough to be a meet return for the great compliment he had paid me.

Ah, how can a woman be ungrateful to the man who offers her real, disinterested affection! she must be very hard of heart, who has no thanks to give for so rich an offering as love, even when she will not, or cannot, set and wear the jewel in her bosom.

Guy thought me too gentle in my answer to Mr. Vincent, while I feard I had been rude and hasty; how could I inflict a pang, who had known so many? But the empire of the universe would

not have bribed me to marry an unloved man, and I comforted myself for Mr. Vincent's wounded feelings, when I heard that he was busy, building new rooms to the old house, had bought additional fields, and was trying fresh experiments in cultivation, besides having introduced a new method of bleeding his patients, and a novel mode of shoeing horses. Mr. Vincent constantly brought down to Warford the latest medical and other scientific works; he belonged to every branch of every society; he was universal!

It was impossible that a man so fully occupied could have leisure for sentimental regrets. It seemed equally impossible that any man could regret a woman who was not beautiful.

CHAPTER XIII.

ALICE.

Time marched on, and brought a few changes to Warford; silver crowns for some heads, blushing roses for others, for some the aureole of saints in heaven. The white old maid who had borne so sharp a cross for many years under her virgin robe, and had smiled all the while, had renewed the glory of her youth. The lover of her girlhood, who had seemed dead, or false, had returned after long wanderings, to spend the autumn of life beside her.

Both of them were growing old, and people smiled derisively, as they went up the path-way of the church and got married; but they looked supremely happy in their calm contentment, and very much as if heaven had begun for them this side of the dark river they would now cross hand in hand.

Mr. Vincent's attentions to me had entirely ceased; he was quietly wooing fortune, with a When he and I met, there was no sober love. agitation, no offended dignity, nor wounded feeling; his manner rather implied, "Ah, well, the loss has been yours! If you had married me, we should have been comfortable in the little carriage together! You would have darned my socks nicely, and could have listened to my plans for improving the place. As it is, no matter! I don't mind driving alone; my housekeeper is a capital stocking-mender, and after all, where can a man find so good a listener as himself? one too, who would listen without contradicting a word of the supposed theory, and who never wearies of the discourse!"

All the mothers of Warford wanted Mr. Vincent to marry their daughters, but he would not, and they were grieved at his decision, for he really was worth having; good-tempered, young, handsome, they said, not to speak of the amount of prosperity, which made him a good match! They hoped against hope that he would marry at last, but instead of taking to himself a wife, Mr. Vincent brought home a sister. A pretty, timid, rosy face peeped shyly up over the top of the Doctor's pew, one Sunday, and showed a lovely pair of blue eyes, that fell immediately beneath the gaze of the beholder.

So young, only seventeen; so sweet, for she was innocent of all the wicked world's ways, and so innocently in love with the blue ribbon that floated over her white muslin dress.

Alice was very, very pretty, nearly every one thought so; I exaggerated her beauty perhaps, and told Guy that "Mr. Vincent's sister was lovely!"

"Pshaw!" said Guy, contemptuously, "a pretty wax doll! a mere puppet! I see nothing in her, perhaps you do, as she is "Mr. Vincent's sister."

"That is nothing to me," said I, very much hurt at the allusion.

"Forgive me, Rachel," said Guy, humbly, "I know I am a great brute; you see my temper is not what it was; pity me!"

Alice Vincent became ere long the belle and spoilt pet of Warford. I don't think she was a coquette, nor inordinately vain either, but she knew how very pretty she was, and she liked to be admired. She had no little artful tricks to force men into declarations, and the sudden uplifting of a timid blue eye, with a look of confiding tenderness, was really natural to her.

Then she was amiable and obliging to every one, a little wilful perhaps, a little selfish, too, but that the women only found out, others found in her a lovely little fairy, exquisitely fair and delicate, one whose very aspect demanded and obtained protection. Guy alone saw nothing in her, nothing at all! how long it was before he saw anything in Alice beyond a pretty wax doll with no eye-lashes!

Alice grew very fond of me; she was always seeking some excuse for coming to see me; sometimes it was for mere walking sake, sometimes to ask me to teach her a new stitch, to advise her about some trifling article of dress, to tell her what to read! To read! I might as well have told the canary that sang above our heads what to read! and should scarcely have been more surprised to see a literary journal between the bars of his cage than to see a real book in Alice's hands, unless it had been a book of the fashions.

Alice was amiable in every way; she knew I had refused her brother, and she forgave me, even after she had tried in vain to make me recant my determination; perhaps she did not altogether think the matter hopeless; she so often told me how happy I should be with "Thomas," and how nicely I should dress as his wife; he would be so liberal! Ah, how much of the happiness and glory of a woman's life I have missed by not knowing the real value of dress

and ornament! How much that simple girl enjoyed, from which I was debarred by my insensibility! I have seen Alice's face radiate with joy at the sight of a pretty dress. I have seen her dance with delight on the arrival of an elegant bonnet.

Six months went by.

Guy declared Alice "a nice little thing, an artless child; he hoped she would always retain her simplicity. Strange that that fellow Vincent should have such a charming sister; was it not?"

Perhaps it was strange! but a pretty face lays hold on the fancy, and who could judge the owner? It would be too much to ask from a man. I admired the simple child myself; her sweet face had a great charm for me; it was like sitting by a murmuring brook in summer time, to hear her talk—a little rippling stream, sweet and pleasant and monotonous. But in the end one wearied of the artless prattle, and longed for a

thought, or a feeling to break through the monotony of the stream. Well, the thought never rose to the surface, but the feeling came all too soon. Guy came often to see me, as I have said, and Alice was almost always at my side.

Guy rarely spoke to her, seldom seemed to notice her at all, but though his words to her were few, though his very glances rather went into space than into her fair young face, his image was ere long impressed on her soft heart and brain, and Alice was in love.

We three, Guy, Alice and I were walking one day in my mother's garden, which boasted only the common flowers that seem familiar friends; Guy was talking to me, and as he talked he carelessly plucked a little flower and held it towards me. I stretched out my hand to take it, but it was already in that of Alice, who was walking the other side of me; was the flower meant for me, or her? I knew not; I know not

now, but that frail blossom changed the course of at least two lives; mine it changed not perhaps, but it scattered snow on the river of my life, which before had ran coldly enough.

There was a tender startled look in Alice's blue eyes as she glanced up at Guy, and surprise, a sort of awakening tenderness in his face as he glanced at her, and probably read her love for the first time. Alice blushed deeply; she was innocent, a little vain, a little selfish no doubt, but still innocent. She showed her young budding love artlessly. Guy was touched, if not more; how could he be otherwise? and then-But why dwell on this? What need to tell how the old story went on, till the girl's love called forth the deep passion of the man, and there was the old time brought back; a pair of fond lovers seeming to forget all on earth, but their own existence. When spring came round again with primroses and violets in the hedges, there came, too, lovers' walks, long and lingering in the evenings.

I lost my two companions, unless on rare occasions, when they came to see me, and Alice thanked me for her happiness; thanked me, though I would rather have died than have seen her the wife of Guy.

Alone—alone once more! looking into my heart's desolate chambers, wherein amidst the dust and ruin of years, was going on a deadly fight between ill-extinguished passions, jealous anguish, and more generous feelings, honour and conscience. Alas, honour and conscience were soon disarmed, and passion, despairing, hopeless passion triumphed. Yet Guy, who had known me so long, so well, never read what was passing within me. How my pride forged the vizor, I know not, but I kept it closely down.

My mother alone understood me; she was grieved and mortified; what labour I had to soften her wounded feelings, and to prevent her unguardedly betraying her disappointment at the final overthrow of her cherished hopes.

How few events our lives had had; none that the world would count, but my father's death, yet how much had gone on in the dark chambers of imagery within me!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE NEW LOVE.

Gur's new love had nothing of the old one about it; he was grave now, however happy, and if the old cloud had passed from his brow, the shadows were still left behind; the wounds might be healed, but the scars would last for a life time.

There was a great deal of tenderness in this new love; Guy spoke of Alice as "the dear child!" her love for him was worship; in her eyes he was a dazzling divinity.

I looked on with a sort of contempt, and, may heaven forgive me, there was a secret exultation within me, when time clearly showed more and more, what a poor little creature Alice was in mind and character, what an utter absence there was in her of all that makes the noblest part of a woman. I despised myself for my unworthy feelings, but I had fortunately pride enough to conceal them; honour enough to act as though they had not existed. When Guy talked to me of Alice, I did not depreciate her; I was only silent, and he thought me a good, kind, patient listener.

His confidences now were not like those he had reposed in me in the days of his earlier romance, when all life seemed to lie before him as a paradise of roses and sunshine, whose golden portals he was passing hand-in-hand with an angel, to the symphony of eternal music. No, Guy's dreams were over! he did not ask the impossible to be, nor expect miracles, but he seemed to love Alice with a grave, solemn affection, that was rather protecting tenderness than absolute fellowship of feeling; it was a love that never would have been, but for gratitude. Perhaps Guy thought that the news of this fresh

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attachment might be wafted over the wide waters to Julia Darrel, that she might hear that he had won a fair young bride, younger, fairer than herself.

- Guy never dwelt on his own coming happiness, but always on what he would do for Alice, to make her life sunny and to shelter her from the world's cold winds.

"I tell you all this, Rachel," he would say, because you have been a good, kind friend, nay, a sister to me! What would my life have been without you if you had married? I don't know what would have become of me. Now, poor little, motherless Alice will find everything in you, and you will be a blessing to us both; she is so young, so inexperienced, I had almost said, so helpless! She will need some one older, wiser than herself to lean upon. I shall make a solemn, grave husband, Rachel; too sad and solemn for a bright young creature like her. Sometimes I think I was wrong to pretend to her. I never should have dreamt of such a thing, only I saw—"

"You saw that she loved you, Guy, and you were grateful."

"True," said Guy; "surprised and grateful, most grateful; real love must draw forth love in return?"

"Must it?" said I, involuntarily.

"It must, indeed," he answered, while a mist passed over his expressive eyes; "the past mad dream broke my life, but it left me more capable of an unselfish love than I should otherwise have been. The first woman looked on me with real sympathy drew forth my slumbering feelings, and my affection for this sweet child, if less passionate, is a worthier, holier love than I ever knew before."

I smiled rather bitterly.

"Ah!" continued Guy, "I see what you think, Rachel; I was deceived once, you think that I may be so again."

"Not so," said I; "Alice will be faithful,"

"Then you mean that my imagination paints this dear child with false colours. No, indeed, my fancy is dead and buried. Alice is sweet and innocent, loving and docile; but I see that she loves finery with all a woman's passion. The serious cares of life will chase all that away, and —yes, she will be very different presently, especially with you for a guide and friend."

He sighed deeply as he spoke, and looked far less like a happy lover than a thoughtful young father.

At last Alice seemed to waken to a deeper feeling than her childlike love, and Guy looked happier than he had seemed since Julia's desertion. A gleam of something like light began to play over the scars of the old wounds, and I saw that he had at last won peace.

CHAPTER XV.

ALONE BESIDE THE HEARTH.

But love is not all of life; at least passion is not. Even while I was torturing myself with futile efforts to subdue my lonely, unshared love, torturing myself even more to conceal its existence from every eye, the little cloud no bigger than a man's hand was rising in my sky, which was to grow ere long into a desolating storm, sweeping the last lingering fire from my lonely hearth.

My companion, friend, mother, my all in all, was sickening unto death. Ere long I perceived my coming sorrow, and the shadow cast beforehand fell upon me like a pall, dark, heavy and benumbing.

I was a coward, and trembled at the prospect of my coming desolation, while the reaper was advancing to cut down the harvest of a noble life.

The dear saint trembled not, but she looked at me sometimes with sad, yearning eyes, as though she would fain have drawn me with her to happier regions.

At first we only exchanged looks, but they said much; presently she gained courage to speak of the coming separation.

- "You will have the means of living in material comfort, darling," she said; "but in other things you will be very poor when I am gone—poor in relations, friends and affections."
- "I shall have God," I answered; "and life is short, mother dearest. I shall soon be with you again."
- "Wait God's time," she answered, reverently.

 "Now, send for Guy Rolfe! I would it could be otherwise, but there are certain worldly matters I must settle with him. Do you think he will marry that child?" she added, anxiously.

- "Alice! Yes, he will marry Alice."
- "And when he is married you will lose even your friend and adviser!"
- "I think not, mother dear; Guy was always kind-hearted, and now is much more thoughtful than he was. But I can't think of myself and of petty cares just now. I can see but you, hear but you, feel but the touch of your hands! Let all else go, mother!"
- "Yet one thing you will tell me, Rachel; one thing you will promise me, that your mother's heart may rest in peace. You will strive to overcome your attachment to Guy!"
- "Mother, I have striven; I will strive to act worthily."
- "That is like my own dear child! It was my fault, Rachel, all mine, darling. I must needs do the work of Providence, and so God let me fail."
- "No, mother, darling, it was my fault! my folly, my weakness. But now I have but one thought on earth, you! When you are gone from

me, your image will fill my memory for ever, it will leave no room for any other."

"Time will strengthen and console you, Rachel, even for my loss. One promise you will make me, dearest, only one—"

"I will promise all, everything!"

"Only this, when a good, worthy man offers you his love, you will cast aside all romantic dreams, and marry him. It is impossible but that true worth should gain your regard."

Involuntarily I shuddered; marriage with an unloved being seemed so horrible; I had covered my face with my hands; my mother drew them gently down, and repeated, "promise me, Rachel!" so wistfully, so solemnly, I could not help giving the pledge she asked.

Well might I have said "yes" to her, it seemed so little likely that I should ever hear the voice of love again. I had heard it, or something like it once, but it was untunable to my ear; could it ever be otherwise? Impossible then, it is now impossible, so will it ever be! Thank God, the

trial has never come, if it had I must bave kept my promise to my dying mother.

As it was, that promise made my mother happy; she had more faith in her child's destiny than I had in my own. Guy came to talk over business—those dreadful business matters which seem to come so cruelly in the last precious hours of lingering life.

I remembered another death-bed at which Guy had stood, remembered my father's half-expressed wishes, the mute appeal in his glazing eyes, as they met those of Guy. Would my mother repeat that appeal? No, no; or, if she did, my present grief was too absorbing not to dull all sense of the great shame.

But it was only dry business matters that they talked of, and I was grateful to Guy that he smoothed the details so gently, so skilfully, as to spare the dear sufferer much weariness that she must otherwise have undergone.

As it was, my mother had many injunctions to give Guy about my poor little interests, but she did not by word, or look commend me to his special care.

Perhaps he saw the omission, perhaps he thought he would anticipate the unexpressed wish, for he gently took my hand in his, and said, "Rachel shall always find a brother and faithful friend in me." My mother looked at me with a sad, tender smile, then a little more of hope animated her face, she breathed forth, "Into thy hands I commend my spirit," and closed her eyes just as the sun went down.

CHAPTER XVI.

A WEDDING.

My grief for my mother's death was so absorbing, that it seemed to obliterate all remembrance of past sorrows, or joys. I went through the business of life in a waking dream, but always with a sense of a dull, aching pain in my heart, not always understanding what had given that pain.

Guy came and went, unheeded; he seemed little to me now; not much more than the workmen who came in and out, repairing the old premises, or the gardener who worked now and then in the garden, which had grown wild and ragged from neglect during the last days that my darling had lingered upon earth. I smiled when I tried to recall what I had once suffered for Guy's sake! Had it been real, all that suffering and agony! Yes, real as the storm that sweeps by and leaves wreck and desolation behind, real as the wound which leaves a scar that no time can obliterate.

But that time of trouble seemed long ago; it was a buried sorrow over which the long grass of the church-yard was waving. How could I think of it beside the new-made grave, whereon yet no green blade, nor flower rose? I had at least fulfilled one injuction my mother had laid upon me; I had overcome my unshared, humiliating love; I had conquered, or my holier sorrow had conquered for me, by throwing down the false god.

Oh, poor, weak humanity! impotent even to know the little world in one's own heart! blindness that cannot see through the little chamber, and discern the real pictures on its walls, the real images in its niches.

Guy stood beside me—it was nothing strange, he came so often in my hour of sorrow. I felt nothing but the dull pain in my bosom that had ached night and day for three long months.

I put my cold hand listlessly, in his—he drew it gently through his arm, and began slowly pacing up and down the garden beside me. He asked me many questions, about my health, my occupations, my readings. I answered with indifference, scarcely with thanks.

Guy stood still a moment, in the little path; he looked in my face with a kindly smile.

- "Rachel!" I scarcely replied by a look or word—"Don't you think we are happier when we are doing something for others?"
 - "Of course."
- "Now then, Rachel, will you rouse yourself to do something for me? for your old childhood's friend?"
 - "For you, Guy?"
 - "Yes; will you?"
 - "Certainly."

But I know my words were cold and heartless.

"Rachel, I want you to help that poor child

about her wedding clothes, she is such a helpless little puss!"

Ah! the old sorrow was not dead after all; or it rose from the dead with a sudden rush that rent the stone I had rolled to the door of the sepulchre. It was all in vain that I had fought the fight, and that sorrow had fought it for me. A flood of tumultuous feeling rushed through my heart—love, jealousy, despair! I pressed my hands on my bosom to still its throbs.

- "The child! the child!" I repeated.
- "Yes, Alice; you will help her for my sake, Rachel, won't you?"
- "Yes, yes, Guy," I answered; "but forgive my emotion, a wedding comes so strangely on a funeral!"

I felt as if I should die, and trembled all over; but Guy saw nothing. He was thinking of Alice. Alas! I had not conquered. My mother's grave stood not as I had hoped, between me and my sins and follies. My visions of heaven grew every day paler—fading, fading away. Earth was fast

filling up every crevice in the temple of my soul, but I strove to shut the door, and to hide what was going on within me.

I helped Alice choose her wedding clothes; nay, I worked at them. I adorned her for her wedding. I smoothed her bright hair, and put the bridal crown on her head with my own hands -hands cold and damp as with death dews. Nay, I kissed her, and wished her joy as the other women did, for I had set my face as a flint, and under its stony aspect they could not see my breaking heart. Oh! when does selfish happiness see another's misery! I stood by and saw them married; saw the brief, bright look of happy triumph that he gave her when they were pronounced one till death! Saw her answering glance, and there in the very temple, before the altar of God, the fiend entered into my heart, and I hated them both, with a fierce, unwomanly hatred!

My sin was great, but I had loved Guy; loved him as that feeble child never could. I would have worn out my life as his slave, and made it my glory. And she—what will she do for him? She will smile, dress her hair, and wear pink ribbons. If he is sick she will dance for him; if he is sad and weary, she will prattle some baby talk; if he is in misery and poverty, she will fold her helpless hands and weep. He will be thankful for even her silly smiles, and prize them more than the life-blood of the woman who would pour out her soul for him.

Well, it is over! Farewell to the mad dream of years, which nothing but this stern reality could dissipate.

There is no nunnery now with its open portal to hide my humiliation. I live in the nineteenth century. I must work as usual, gossip, go out tea drinking; and when Guy and Alice come back from their wedding tour, I must pay them a visit of ceremony, and eat a piece of their wedding cake with a smiling face.

For the rest of my life I must sit opposite to them in church every Sunday, praying prayers sin. Why can I not reason myself into the belief that what I see is false! That he, Guy Rolfe, my old familiar friend, is laid to rest under the green turf, or that he has sailed away over the wide ocean, to a far-off world, for ever! The man I saw standing beside Alice at the altar is not he; no, no, it was a stranger who had caught his trick of look, or voice, or manner. The grave is closed and a seal is-set upon it; the ship has sailed away so far—so far that not a trace of her slender mast is seen in the blue distance. I am alone now; alone while a busy crowd is around me. Presently I will write the rest of this history of a heart, if it is to have added pages.

PART THE SECOND.

CHAPTER XVII.

SOME YEARS LATER.

Guy had gone with his young wife for the usual honeymoon; they had wandered for a week or two over the Lake Country, they had visited the few sacred shrines man has there made in God's fair creation.

Guy had carried with him a few pleasant volumes to read aloud for Alice's delight and instruction; he had pointed out to her the choice beauties in the Lake poets, but she shrank from Wordsworth as she would have shrunk from a

dry discourse of Tillotson; and when he read aloud to her Southey's glorious lines, "They sin who tell us love can die," &c., she remarked, "That is very pretty!" Ah, well! she had also said that the Lakes themselves, God's visible poem, were "pretty." She had looked so pretty herself while she thus prattled, that Guy at last persuaded himself that her beauty ought to be enough to charm a reasonable man, not to speak of her sunny temper.

Such was her happy humour, that when a becoming silk dress was utterly spoilt by a storm among the hills she only laughed. It is true that the dress was soon replaced by a more expensive one, bought in the nearest town, and that the bride took a fancy to various other delicate articles at the same time.

This brought them back nearly a week sooner than the proposed time for their return home, but Alice came quite willingly; she cared not where she was, provided Guy were with her. I did not go to see them when they reached Warford, but they soon sent for me.

I was not anxious to go to them, but still ready. My mad dream was over; when love ceases to be innocent it is dead; mine I had slain, I thanked God and took courage. Henceforth, Guy Rolfe was my old friend and brother, and I could love his little child-wife.

It was eleven o'clock; Guy had not yet gone to business. The house he had taken for his bride was at a short distance from the office, and quite a bijou in its way. He seemed to have been fitting up a baby house for a favourite doll. The carpets were strewed, as if by nature, with delicate pink roses, while silk damask curtains hung where plain muslin would have suited as well. All was on a small scale truly, but still costly; too costly for a young lawyer in country practice. Alas, Guy owed for all this! he who had hated debt! but then a little extravagance seemed warranted, nay, almost demanded, as

Alice was to bring with her a small fortune of seven thousand pounds. Her brother had put her money out at interest in a very secure and profitable investment; it was to produce eight per cent.

Yes, the house was beautiful, and the bride was beautiful, for Alice's face was illuminated by a deeper feeling than had ever before lit it.

But Guy had a shade of sadness, if not of vexation on his brow; the first little cloud had entered their Eden; would it grow bigger?

Guy greeted me warmly, and I felt from that time that I was the maiden sister of the family.

- "I am so glad you've come, Rachel," cried Alice, eagerly, and throwing her arms round my neck; "we have only been married three weeks, and naughty Guy will go to that horrid office, and leave me all alone!"
 - " Business-" Guy began.
- "Business! don't talk of it; I hate the word, and hate the man that invented it. Why can't people live without business?"

Guy shrugged his shoulders a little, but he only said—

- "A particular case comes on in a few days; my father wants me to prepare the notes."
- "But you don't belong to him now; you belong to me—to me, Sir; do you hear?" and she pulled his head down to her level by his curly locks, and kissed his forehead.
- "All very good, child," said Guy, "but what are we to live upon?"
- "Live upon! Oh, my little fortune; it is seven thousand pounds you know, darling Guy, and I—no, we are to have eight per cent., and that makes, I don't quite know what it makes, but I know its ever so much money. You see I do know something about business," and while speaking she swayed Guy's head backwards and forwards like a plaything.
- "This will never do, you spoilt child," said Guy, half in jest, half in earnest, smiling and sighing, too, as he shook his curls from Alice's grasp, and hastily kissing her cheek, rushed to

the door. But the bride was not to be so baffled; what is a lord of creation to a child-wife! What is a man's will compared to woman's will!

Alice rushed after her husband; threw herself into his arms, bursting into a passionate shower of tears, sobbing as if her heart would break, and brought out in broken murmurs—

"Only married three—three weeks, and leaving—leaving your own dear little wife for that horrid office!"

"There, there, I'll stay at home to-day, darling; don't cry! it will only be a few extra hours' work for the next few days. Alice will grow more reasonable with time," said Guy, aside to me, and in a sort of apologetic tone.

Alice dried her April shower in a minute, and danced round Guy like a fairy, caressing his cheek, pulling his curls and laughing.

That was but one of many such scenes, meanwhile, the day then being was to be devoted to sunshine. The bride did the honours of the elegant little home with much grace, if with little knowledge. I was constrained to stay, and to visit very nock and corner of the house.

"Now come to my own room, Rachel, my darling sister; you are my sister you know, if you are Guy's. I din't mean anything about my brother, so don't be offended," and Alice was hurrying me away.

"Then you can release me," said Guy, starting up again, " if you two are going up-stairs for a long feminine gossip."

"No, no, we shall only be gone ten minutes. There, Guy, take one of your dear books till we come back. On your peril move, Sir!" and she shook her little finger at him, while with the other hand she threw a railway guide to him, upside down. "One book will do just as well as another, you know."

Once more Guy sighed and sat down, but the book fell on the floor.

Alice put her arm round my waist and drew me up-stairs.

There, during three long hours did she dilate

to me on her love and her happiness, her dresses, and her trinkets. The dresses she spread out fondly on the bed; the trinkets were laid in due order on the toilet table.

"Isn't it nice to be married, and to have all these beautiful things, and to be ever so much loved besides?" said Alice, when she had told me the history of each trifle, and had tried them all on for my entertainment. "Oh, do get married, Rachel! it is so nice."

"Are you coming down to-day?" called Guy, from the foot of the stairs, "dinner has been getting cold this half-hour. Do you know it is half-past three?"

"Is it? Oh, I'm so sorry, darling. Coming directly," and Alice begun to shovel rather than to replace her pretty things in the drawers and wardrobe and trinket-box.

"Better leave them till after dinner," said I, and then I will help you to fold the dresses neatly."

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- "Fold them neatly! oh, dear Rachel, what an old maid's idea."
- "But if you spoil all these pretty things?" said L
- "Guy will buy me some more; Guy buys everything I ask for."
 - "But money is not inexhaustible, dear Alice.'
- "Oh, you prudent darling! didn't you hear me say just now, that I had seven thousand pounds, in a capital investment, at eight per cent.?"
 - "But you talked of living on that, Alice."
- "To be sure I did! but is not dressing a part of living? and a very large part too! Really to hear some people talk, one would fancy that the horrid butcher and baker and milkman were to have all one's money!"

Of what avail, to reason with the child?

"Are you coming down to-day?" repeated Guy, with a little impatience, and he certainly frowned as we entered the room. But Alice soon smiled him into sunshine, and reconciled him to bear man's worst trial, a spoilt dinner.

- "Oh, this wasted day!" sighed Guy, that evening.
- "How can a day be wasted that is given to love?" said Alice.
 - "To love-or to dresses? little wife," said Guy.

CHAPTER XVIIL

GUY'S PARENTS.

MRS. ROLFE, the elder, had been a handsome woman for a few years, and a very selfish one all her life. Her husband had married her in her youth, from that sort of love, if love it is, which springs entirely from admiration of a showy person; but on closer intimacy he had discovered neither heart nor mind to engage his affections, or to win his esteem. Mrs. Rolfe was the incarnation of careful selfishness; all the little soul she possessed had been concentrated on herself for so many years, that to look well, fare well, and be the first person considered in every company, was the end of her existence. Too calculating for

absolute imprudence, or for debt, she had reached the mature age of fifty without ever having experienced any passion but that of selfishness.

The love of the husband had died early, but he was pre-eminently a respectable man, and lived on excellent terms with his wife, treating her with the most exact respect, and all those scrupulous attentions which are more easily paid than strife is endured. Mr. Rolfe was a hard, stiff man of business, a laborious worker in his profession, living most of his life in the dingy office which was little indicative of prosperity. long time his only clerk had been his son, latterly a salaried youth sat perched on the high stool in the dusty corner through the long day, and said, "Yes, Sir," "No, Sir," when addressed. Though the principal never scolded and scarcely frowned, he never smiled. There was something in the hard, cold face that forbade familiarity, and even approach; in every wrinkle sat something repellant. And yet Mr. Rolfe had been a good-looking man in his time, perhaps an agreeable one; now

he was simply an iron-grey machine for business.

He said his practice was improving, but he always were a shabby coat; Mrs. Rolfe redeemed the credit of the house, by the constant habit of dressing handsomely.

Guy bore little personal resemblance to either parent; nature had given him a frank, open temper, and an affectionate disposition; but whatever he felt towards his father or mother, he could never approach near enough to them, to show tenderness or sympathy.

The mother liked and exacted minute attentions, but repelled affection. The father treated his son as he did the rest of the world, only exacting a little less work from him than from others, and he never condescended to give him any more explanation of his affairs than was absolutely necessary for one who was to assist in conducting them.

Mrs. Rolfe visited a good deal in the town, in a dignified, stately sort of way. Mr. Rolfe was seldom known to break bread in another man's house, unless it were in that of some rich client, and then he never forgot the man of business, nor unloosed his tongue to talk freely, as other men talked, on the common affairs of life.

CHAPTER XIX.

LITTLE CLOUDS RISING.

THE glory had not departed from the love of Guy and Alice some time later, but change and decay were creeping into the little household. The untidy, slovenly servant that opened the door was a type of all within. Dust and dirt dimmed the roses on the delicate carpet, and grease spots, emanating from some unknown, mysterious source, appeared on the damask curtains. All was disorder and confusion from cellar to garret. The beautiful bridal dresses were all spoilt, or nearly so. They were torn or rumpled; a dark patch of something indescribable formed a sort of trimming down each side of the silken skirts, while

the more delicate fabrics showed sundry rents unrepaired, or coarsely drawn together. table-cloth reigned supreme at meals! and those meals were --- Alice rose late, but she was always dressed and coiffée as early as twelve o'clock, i.e., directly breakfast was over. sometimes frowned, but Alice had the blessing of a sunny temper, and never was her sunshinclouded by a shadow of ill-humour. A word, a look of reproach, would make her dissolve in tears, but never did she return either. There was an endearing tenderness in her manner, and I soon learnt to understand how easy it was for her to win forgiveness for short-comings. She had but to raise her innocent, loving eyes to her young husband's face, with that look of tender confidence, to disarm him in a moment. she did nothing useful, but she loved him; she hated all serious occupations, nay, all occupations whatever, but she loaded him with tender epithets The house was wretched from disand caresses.

order, the repasts comfortless and unpunctual, but Alice never excused herself, always promised to be better, to do better.

Poor Guy! his was a cheerless home, save for the lovely face and the sweet temper.

Guy often looked sad, harrassed, and regretful. I knew all his home troubles, but I could not help fancying that he had other, perhaps weightier, cares.

He went earlier to the office and returned later, despite Alice's tears and entreaties. Sometimes he shut himself up at home for several hours, with his papers, and during that time even Alice herself could not gain admittance to the little dusty den he called his own. When he came forth again he looked more grievously careworn than ever. He received a great many letters on blue paper, and a good many business-looking men called upon him at the office, who were not all clients; many such called at his house, and they were not friends. The house expenses were

great, and Guy hinted that he thought they might be lessened, that one servant might do for their little household. Alice made no objections to the retrenchment, but her eyes filled with tears, so the two maidens with fly-away caps remained, and looked very nice on Sundays when the excorporal policeman came to the under-door for his rations, and made each girl believe he was her own particular lover.

Alice was a kind mistress; she never contradicted her servants; she gave them a great many ribbons and laces, and shoes and gloves, and then, having left herself destitute of those necessary articles, she was perforce obliged to buy new ones, but the Warford draper, who had his gloves, and laces, and ribbons from Paris, was profuse of credit, so was the shoemaker.

With such tradespeople, Alice assured me, one could live on next to nothing! they were not like the tiresome butcher and baker, who would not wait, and grew quite surly sometimes if money

were not forthcoming. Alice might be rather slovenly at home, and unlike the elegant little bride she had been; but when she went out, she was as careful of her toilet as ever, and looked almost as perfectly dressed as Mrs. Rolfe, senior.

I had still my lonely little home on the outskirts of the town, and, with a solitary maid, I
lived a quiet life, sometimes peopling my solitude
with the shadows that rose from the dead past,
never looking to the future, as far as my own
destiny was concerned. It seemed to me that
the book of my life was closed, to be opened
again, and its story continued in eternity. Yet
I was young in years to have done with Earth's
flowers and sunshine, and sometimes when little
Mary stood at the garden gate talking to the carpenter's apprentice in low, quiet tones, I felt a
sort of pity of my own great loneliness, which
would ever increase until evening shadows should
gather round my life.

I seldom entered Warford unless summoned by Alice, who would sometimes send for me with a few hasty words, such as these:—

"MY DARLING SISTER,-

"Come, pray do come directly, I am in great trouble, and want you, oh, so badly! Naughty Guy is at that horrid office, which I am afraid he loves better than his little wifie. Do come, or I must go to him, and I am so frightened of that dreadful father of his!

"Now do, do come!

"ALICE."

I always answered these appeals quickly, feeling very sure that if I did not, Alice would go to the office, and worry Guy in his most weary working hours; besides, perhaps, procuring an unpleasant scene for him with his father.

When I thus replied to Alice's imperative summons, I sometimes found it was to consult me on some trifling subject of dress, of amusement, or for a mere whim. Sometimes, however, it was to rescue her from serious dilemmas: a milliner's, or perfumer's bill, which she could not pay! "for," whispered Alice, "Guy keeps me very short of money, very, and my brother never makes me a present, never so much as thinks of it!"

Thus Alice began to borrow money from me secretly, she would return it all some day, of course! I little cared whether she returned it or not, but sometimes I doubted whether I was right or honorable, to help Alice to deceive her husband, even in a trifle; and yet I did it to save him vexations and embarrassments.

Alas! I saw that the little cloud was already gathering in the horizon, that would one day burst in a desolating storm over poor Guy's life. I saw it too well. The little crack was already made in the side of the vessel, which would one day sink her in the ocean, and yet I said nothing! I was a coward, a cruel coward, wanting courage to speak the truth and inflict a little wound in

order to spare a great sorrow. Of what avail were my feeble remonstrances to Alice! She kissed me, and promised like an amiable child to incur no more unnecessary bills; but ere a week or two had gone, there was the same hasty summons on a similar occasion.

- "You see, Rachel dear, I never run in debt, except for the necessaries of life."
 - "Oh, Alice!" I cried, "eau-de-Cologne!"
- "Oh, that's medicine you know. I often nearly faint, the eau-de-Cologne saves me!"
 - "And the Paris bonnet?"
- "Why, Rachel, I was obliged to buy that to look decent, commonly decent, and to keep up Guy's credit; he told me we must keep up appearances, and all that sort of thing, for his credit's sake."
- "I don't think he meant that kind of keeping up appearances." I ventured to say.
- "I should think I knew what he meant. I should think that I, Guy's wife, understood him," said Alice, trying to look dignified.

"Still I think, Alice, that he meant general neatness in yourself, and in—the house," I said.

"Well, perhaps he meant both," said Alice, "but you see I have no talent for housekeeping, and must leave that to the servants; they are not very clever, but we don't give them high wages, and one can't always scold them, you know."

"Of course not, Alice, but you could direct them!"

"Oh, I have no head for directing; I'm sure I'm worried out of my life about a thousand things. It's perfectly wretched not to be rich; perfectly wretched to see beautiful things one can't get! I'm sure I don't want much, only absolute necessaries. By the by, Rachel, have you been at Benfield's lately?"

"No, indeed I have not!"

Benfield was a new draper, just set up in opposition to the long-established dealer patronised by Mrs. Guy Rolfe, and who had her name repeated many times in his books. No, I had never been there.

- "He has the loveliest lace mantle from London, that you can fancy; Spanish lace, and so cheap, only four guineas and a half."
- "Cheap for such an article, no doubt, Alice, but a great deal for a poor professional man's wife to give!"
- "Do you think so? I thought it so cheap! I asked Guy to give it to me, but he refused—the first thing he ever did refuse me; isn't it strange?"
 - "No, Alice; he could not afford it."
 - "How can you tell?"
- "By the mere fact of his having refused it to you. Oh, Alice, don't run poor Guy in debt."
- "How you talk, Rachel! you forget that I brought him a fortune—seven thousand pounds, out at good interest, eight per cent., you know." She forgot to add that the capital was still in Mr. Vincent's hands, and the interest in considerable arrears. Then Alice resumed,

"There's no credit at Benfield's, unfortunately."

"Quite right," said I, "good for themselves, better still for their customers."

While we were talking Guy appeared, weary, and carelessly dressed, almost a sloven.

He threw himself on the sofa, and rather endured than met Alice's caresses, so thoroughly dispirited did he seem.

- "Any one been, child?" he asked presently.
- "Yes, that horrid man from the brewery, he says he must have his bill."
 - "Well?"
- "Then the upholsterer's man about the curtains."
 - "What curtains?"
- "The new one's, darling, these are spoilt, you know, we must have new ones. You said the house must be kept neat!"
 - "We can't afford it, Alice."
 - "You always say that now, Guy."
 - "When will dinner be ready, Alice?"

"In half-an-hour, durling. I have just seen the meat put down to roast."

Guy groaned, turned his face away, and slum bered, or seemed to slumber.

"Rachel!" said Guy, as we went in to dinner that day, "You have chosen the better part! we married folks are full of cares, what between bills and late spoilt dinners! Never marry, Rachel, especially," and here he lowered his voice almost to a whisper, "especially never marry Vincent!"

CHAPTER XX.

A NEW LIFE.

How lovely little Alice looked, when she hung over the cradle of her first-born daughter, with all a young mother's joy, and tenderness, and pride, shining out from her beautiful eyes, larger, bluer, more lustrous than ever. And Guy! for a little space, a father's proud pleasure smoothed the lines which care had already deeply traced on his forehead.

Baby was a miniature of Alice, and Guy looked from the mother to the child with inexpressible tenderness.

Mrs. Rolfe brought baby a magnificent cloak

and bonnet, remarking that outside clothes were always of the most importance.

Mr. Rolfe excused himself from making a present, saying that he had his reasons.

I, who was chief godmother, sent a trousseau for the little creature just launched on life's troubled waters, all, I thought, that could be wanted by a newly-born little lady, who was neither royal, nor noble.

Alice thanked me very warmly and gratefully, but added,

"Please, dear, don't mention your beautiful present to Guy!"

I was little likely to tell Guy that I had made an offering to his first-born, and I should not have noted it now, only that out of that foolish secret sprang a great sorrow.

The joy that the new comer spread around her made sunshine in Guy's home; but it did not root out the disorder, confusion, and discomfort, of which Alice seemed utterly insensible, but in the face of so much love and happiness annoyances were cheerfully borne, which at other times might have proved painful.

Perhaps that was the happiest month that Alice had known since the honeymoon, and she enjoyed it like a happy child playing at maternity with a beautiful doll. I see them now as they were that day! Young father, mother, and child! Where are they now? Yet let me not anticipate. They had bright hours then—a deep lull in the cares and sorrows of life—days and hours worthy, perhaps, to be weighed against years of sorrow.

I divined a happiness that would never be mine to feel, and I prayed, oh, how I prayed, that it might last! Were my prayers real, faithful heart-wishes? God, that made me, knows they were; then why did they fall to earth fruitless as the vainest desire that selfishness ever uttered!

I stayed with Alice till the baby was five weeks old, doing all and everything I could to help, trying to put in a word of counsel or instruction, now and then, about the house and other matters.

At last I returned home. It seemed to me that the lamp burnt dimmer, and the utter silence was oppressive. I took up my book just where I had dropt it five weeks before; it was one that required thought to understand, and an unpreoccupied mind to appreciate, but mine wandered away, again and again, back to my childhood and Guy's. I saw him once more fishing on the river's banks, dropping his rod, falling, falling, sunk in the deep waters. the moment of blank despair, the rush of hope, the brave dog's plunge, the joyous rescue! Ah, could the bright-haired boy that Brutus had laid at my feet that day, be the father that I had just seen hanging over the cradle of his child! Ah, if Guy had died that day! would it have been well? He would have escaped much, the rude dispersion of his passionate love dreams by a treacherous woman, and the daily cares that surrounded him; but would he not have lost the crowning happiness of life—a parent's joy? "Mr. Rolfe, ma'am," said Mary.

- "Mr. Rolfe!" I repeated.
- "Mr. Guy, ma'am, I mean."
- "Oh, Guy! is there anything wrong," I exclaimed, "the child?"
 - "Is well."
 - "Alice?"
- "Oh, quite well, but I wanted to see you, and was disappointed when I reached home to find that you had left—I want you to do me a service, Rachel, I know you will, if you can."
- "Anything, Guy, you and Alice and baby are all I have left to care for."
- "You know I receive fifty pounds of yours next Saturday?"
 - "Yes, but I had forgotten it."
- "Well, I want your leave to use it for a month, if—"
- "If! oh, brother Guy! what 'if' can there be between you and me?"

- "Thanks, Rachel, it is strange to come to you, perhaps!"
- "No, Guy, it would be much stranger to go elsewhere."
- "The truth is," said Guy, "I am completely driven into a corner, just now. You know I am ostensibly my father's partner, but he limits me to a very small allowance. And, strange to say, though Vincent has such a practice, I can get no money out of him, there must be some screw loose there. I don't let poor little Alice know these ins and outs, for it's no use in the world worrying her with cares and troubles, but I suppose I must look out for them, now that I am a married man," he added, with a little rueful smile. "I'll tell you what I want this money for, Rachel."
- "No, no, Guy! I am only too glad you came to me, it was very kind."
- "Kind! I don't quite see the kindness in borrowing your money, poor girl! But to tell you the truth, Rachel, you are the only creature in

the world to whom I could say all this. Just think, the woman who supplied the baby clothes, is afraid to trust me!"

"Guy!" I am sure I gasped as I spoke, and grew very pale. I had given all the baby-clothes myself!

"Poor Alice!" continued Guy, "you know how I try to keep all worries from her, but this creature, it seems, has been dunning her: Mrs. Cotton, at the corner of the High Street. I wanted to go and talk to her, for we can't have owed the bill more than a few weeks, but Alice made me promise I would leave her alone. That poor child is too delicately organized for the cares of this world! Fancy that coarse creature dunning her!"

"I covered my face with my hands; I could not look at Guy, for shame and sorrow; how could the child-wife look in his eyes and lie to him!"

"Don't take it so seriously to heart, Rachel," said, Guy, trying to smile. "This baby dress-

making, and millinery bill, and a linen-draper's, which—but never mind details. A thousand grateful thanks for this and all your kindness, Rachel," and Guy hurried away.

I shed many tears that night, some for the past and present, but more from the dim forecast shadows of the future. What were my sorrows to those gathering round my old friend! I prayed earnestly that God would give me meet words to speak to Alice, and the power of persuasion, that she might be made to see where her honor and true happiness lay!

CHAPTER XXI.

ALICE'S RULING PASSION.

THE next morning I rose up and went to Alice, the moment I thought Guy would be busy at the office.

There was a maid leaning half-way out of a lower window, dropping several large bundles into a basket which a woman held below.

The front door stood partially open, as the second maid had run to a shop round the corner, and had evidently been "coming back in a minute," for the last half hour!

Poor baby was crying piteously in the cradle, quite uncared for.

The gossip at the window came in suddenly in some confusion, "Please ma'am it was only—only rags!"

I verily believe that Alice's servants looked on me with awe, as the maiden aunt of the family, the particular, the very particular old maid!

I smiled involuntarily at the girl's evident appreciation of my character and position, even while I seemed to confirm her opinion, by admonishing her to use more fidelity to her young mistress.

I passed on, took the weeping child in my arms, and sought Alice, full of courageous resolutions to speak to her of her deception, yet feeling very like a shame-faced culprit myself.

Alice stood before a cheval glass that might have graced the dressing-room of a woman of fashion, but was sadly out of place in that of Mrs. Guy Rolfe, the little lawyer's wife!

She was dressed in entirely new clothes, a rich brocaded silk dress, a Spanish lace mantle, an elegant bonnet, and delicate primrose gloves.

At my entrance, Alice turned round with a sharp cry, "Oh, Bachel! I was so frightened, I thought it was Guy!"

- "Why should you fear Guy, Alice?"
- "I don't fear him; I only meant I did not want to see him just now, at least I did not want him to see me."
 - "No? Yet you are looking very nice."
- "Yes," cried Alice, with a bright face, "is not this bonnet lovely?"
 - "Very, but a tranquil mind is-"
 - "Oh, Rachel, you want to preach to me!"
- "I want to advise you, dear Alice. Alas! I know that I have no right, not the least right in the world to speak, but I must do it!"
- "What are you doing with baby?" asked Alice, suddenly.
- "I took her out of the cradle because she was crying."
- "Where are the servants? there are two in the house."
 - "No, Alice, one is leaning on her elbows on a

counter round the corner, the other was half out the window when I arrived !"

- "They are the plague of one's life!" said Alice.
- "Your's have no principle," I remarked.
- "Principle!" repeated Alice, "They never tell me the truth! but please you must not let Guy know anything about it."
- "Oh, Alice! the very thing I want to say to you is, do tell Guy this, do tell him everything."
- "You ask me impossibilities, Rachel; how can I tell him everything?"
 - "By having nothing which you need conceal."
- "Oh, it is easy for you to talk, you that are so well off, and have one good servant worth a dozen, and a house that always seems to come right of itself, and no one to please but yourself, and no one that dares to question you! But put yourself in my place!"
 - "What then, Alice?"
- "Why, I can't show all these things to Guy, when he does not know that I have them, and, ten to one, if he did know, would lecture me."

- "What pleasure can they give you, then?"
- "Ah, that's what worries me! If I put them on and pay visits, I may meet Guy in the town. This is the lace mantle I told you about; it was only four-pound-ten; very pretty, isn't it?"
- "Very pretty! but oh, Alice, if this continues there will grow up a cloud between you and Guy, and your happiness will be shaken, if not lost."
- "Good heavens, Rachel! there is Guy! For God's sake don't tell. Shut the door; lock it, help me to put these wretched things away. I have deceived Guy, I have lied to him, but I love him—I love him so much, Rachel! I shall die if he finds me out!" Alice burst into a passion of tears, tried, with trembling hands, to untie her bonnet strings, and gasped out, "I bought the mantle, I bought the gown, and all the things, with the money I told Guy was for baby!" and then she fainted.

Guy was at the door of the room.

With some difficulty I commanded myself enough to tell him to wait a few minutes; I put

the child on the soiled bed, threw a little eau-de-Cologne on Alice's face, and directly she was at all conscious, hastily slipped off the unfortunate finery, and replaced it by a wrapper.

I took care to lay the new purchases aside, ere I admitted Guy.

"Tell him nothing! tell him nothing, Rachel!" whispered Alice, entreatingly, clasping her hands.

"Of course I won't," I replied, "I will leave you together."

"No, no, don't go! stay with me."

"What has happened?" exclaimed Guy, coming in. "My poor darling, you have been worried, what is it? I have really a great mind to sell off everything, and go into lodgings! Much less trouble, as well as less expense. Cheer up, Alice, my pet, don't give way! What is it, my poor child? Who has tormented you?'

"No one, no one! it is not that," cried Alice, impetuously, "but I have been so bad, so wicked —you will never, never, forgive me!"

- "Alice, I would forgive you anything, short of being unfaithful to me, and that you can never be."
- "Never, Guy! never! I would die first; but, oh, dear!—"
 - "Well, my darling?"
- "If I were to tell you that I had deceived you —lied to you?"
- "I should say, Alice, that you were trying me, trying me very sorely. You don't know, you can't think, what a trial it would be; I scarcely think I could ever be happy again." He spoke and looked so gravely, that Alice trembled.

I trembled, too, for the storm I had raised, by asking Alice to tell Guy everything. I hastily tried to interrupt the convergation, but Alice rushed to the wardrobe, flung her goodly new garments at her husband's feet, and, bursting into a passion of tears, exclaimed,

"Guy! Guy! I have lied to you to get these things, but I love you! I love you more than my life. Forgive me! forgive me!"

Guy silently raised her from the ground, laid her upon the bed, and, spurning the silks and laces with his foot, left the room.

- "Go after him, Rachel," groaned Alice, "go, or I shall die!"
- "Come back, Guy," I entreated, as I followed him.
- "I can't, Rachel, I can't look upon her face; she has lied to me."
 - "Have you never sinned, Guy?"
 - "Often. But a base, mean, cowardly lie!"-
- "Uttered by an impetuous girl, a mere child! almost as well might you be hard and unforgiving to the little one in the cradle! how can you, how dare you, be severe and unforgiving to her?"
- "Tell her," said Guy, through his clenched teeth, "tell her I will forgive her when I can; but I swear to you, Rachel, that if it ever happens again we part for ever."

Ah! truly the cloud had arisen and hung over the young husband and wife; the dark cloud that threatened to descend in shower storms. Alice was sincere in her penitence, she meant to amend, but she was as weak as the water of a shallow brook. She loved Guy devotedly, but henceforth she feared as much as she loved him.

CHAPTER XXII.

GUY'S TRIALS.

"IT was an awful storm," said Guy to me, a few weeks later, "but it has visibly cleared our little sky. That poor child is so anxious to go right; she tries so hard, too, to keep the house nice and everything in order. I really behaved like a brute that day; I had no right to be so violent and harsh, still we go on much better since. But I fancy we must give up that house, Rachel!"

"Must you, Guy?"

"I fear so. I don't mean to tell poor Alice, but our business at the office is dwindling away; a more smiling, popular man is ousting my father; he says little, but he is visibly uneasy. Alice's little fortune is securely locked from our use, though Vincent assures me it is all right."

- "Can I do nothing to help you and Alice, Guy?"
- "You have helped us enough, Rachel! Bythe-bye, sister, here is your money."
- "Guy, if you would make me happy, keep it."
 - "I cannot, Rachel!"
 - " Not to relieve my mind?"
- "No, not even to relieve your mind. Henceforth I make no debts, have no superfluities."

Involuntarily I glanced at Guy's hand; a ring of some value, which he had always worn, had disappeared.

"Yes, it is gone," continued Guy, smiling a little, "my conscience told me I had no right to wear a diamond while I lectured poor Alice for her love of finery, a passion so natural to a pretty young girl. I sold my ring to help to pay my debts; it did help a little, just a little."

Guy looked careworn, the light had left his

eyes, the very lustre was gone from his curly head.

I was much with the young wife in those days, counselling, helping, sustaining her; she never grew cross, or unjust to others, but she mourned over the privation of luxuries, as if they had been necessaries of life. She spent hours in tears now, which had formerly been dedicated to dressing, and even the smiles and caresses of her child could not win her from her sadness. Self-denial was misery, industry would have been torture. And yet her home was growing more comfortable materially. I had learnt, ere long, that to rouse Alice to exertion was impossible, that to change her ordinary habits was impossible, and that the best help I could give her would be to watch for and fill up as many of her short-comings as I Silently, and not unthankfully, Alice let me act, the more willingly because she had confidence that I would never speak of what I did.

How triumphantly poor Guy showed me, one

day, Alice's nice darning in half-a-dozen pairs of socks.

Alice coloured a little, and bent over the cradle while Guy praised her; when he was gone she whispered, "Forgive my not telling him that you did the socks for me, Rachel; I could not bear to disappoint him, and you know, besides, that silence is not a lie."

CHAPTER XXIII.

MR. VINCENT LOSES HIS PRESENCE OF MIND.

- "I SHALL die! I know I shall die!" gasped poor Alice, who had had a succession of fainting fits and hysterics.
- "Compose yourself, Alice," said Mr. Vincent, in a dignified tone, "hysterical affections are peculiarly capable of being suppressed, and really you might reflect that I am in a much worse position than you are, for I lose everything, everything; therefore, I hold that I am the most in need of sympathy and condolence."
- "I don't mind the money, Tom; I don't mind losing it a bit," sobbed Alice, 'if we need not give up our nice house, and all our comforts, and

if those horrid tradesmen would leave off dunning us for money. I don't mean to be unkind to you, Tom, I'm sure I don't; I don't say it's your fault, but it is very, very hard!" Then came a fresh burst of tears.

"Be reasonable, Alice," said her brother severely, "pray do be reasonable! you are such a baby, I wonder Rolfe has any patience with you."

"Guy is never unkind to me, never! never! never! never!

"I wonder that he isn't then!" muttered Vincent, "I wonder he is not tired of your temper and your airs."

"Mr. Rolfe knows his duty, and loves his wife." I interposed, "Alice is not bad tempered, Mr. Vincent, and you might remember her position!"

"She might remember mine, which is much worse than her's," said he sullenly.

"I do, I do, Tom, poor dear Tom! I am so sorry for you. There, I won't say another word!" said the soft-hearted girl, throwing her arms round her brother's neck, with her usual impetuosity; but he disengaged himself quickly, as a rough man who does not love his children, puts one saide.

"I came here to talk to Rolfe," said he, "to explain the position of affairs. As he is not here, perhaps Miss Arden will be good enough to hear me. You, Alice, are evidently incapable of understanding anything. Pray, Miss Arden, try to translate to my sister these plain words:—"I am ruined, absolutely, utterly ruined, through the failure of a mining enterprise. But Alice's seven thousand pounds are not irretrievably lost; it is true that the firm with which I placed it is in the Gasette, but I have it on good authority, that they will pay a fair dividend!"

"Oh, never mind the money, pray don't talk any more about it!" said Alice, piteously, clasping her helpless hands. "Guy is very clever, and I daresay he will put it all right. I am sure, Tom, he will help you."

"He will have hard work, I am afraid, to help himself!" said Guy, entering.

Mr. Vincent changed colour a little at Guy's approach. He was silent, but Guy turned to him immediately, and frankly held out his hand. "Don't distress yourself, Vincent," said he, "it is worse than folly to grieve over the irretrievable. I did not marry Alice for money; I am quite satisfied that she is mine, with no dower but her loving heart. We must conform to circumstances, forget the past, and begin house-keeping anew, only more humbly. I have already taken a little house."

"Must we leave this, then?" sobbed Alice, "my sweet pretty house, that seemed to me like a fairy palace when first you brought me home to it, Guy? I shall die, I know I shall die!" Then she added, with a gleam of childish satisfaction, "But we must give warning before leaving, I know we must give warning, and then that will make us stay here for months, ever so many months!"

- "I did give warning in due time, Alice," said Guy, "we leave this house at Michaelmas, that is a fortnight from the present time."
- "I hope at least that you are taking my sister to a comfortable home, to a place suitable to her position," said Mr. Vincent, utterly unmindful of Guy's generous kindness to himself.
- "I am taking her to one suitable to our means," said Guy, firmly.
- "I beg your pardon, but am I to understand that the statement made of your affairs, when you married Alice, was incorrect?"
- "No," said Guy, coolly, "but that I am less prosperous now than I was then; besides I had formed expectations—"
- "Mr. Rolfe," said Vincent, "no man has a right to marry upon expectations!" and he spoke with an air of great conscious superiority.
- "You are probably right," said Guy, contemptuously. "To do anything upon the strength of the will-o-wisp of expectations is a folly, if not a sin. But after all, if Alice does not repent,

I have no reason to do so, only we must conform to circumstances."

"Repent marrying you, my darling Guy? never! never! not if you were a beggar. But Tom, dear! you have such a nice large house, can't we come and live with you?"

"With me!" cried Mr. Vincent, utterly aghast, but it would be wretched—horrible, impossible. I tell you I am ruined, penniless! Gcd help you, Rolfe, your wife is an idiot! I wish you well through it all. Goodbye!" and Mr. Vincent withdrew.

Alice alternately caressed her husband and child, and lamented over their destiny and her own. She could do nothing else; it seemed that she had come into the world for no more serious business than to be pretty, caressing, and to weep, or smile. Guy sank on a seat, and covered his face with his hands. "Don't give way, brother Guy!" I whispered." "God is alive, and all will come right some day."

"I am not despairing, Rachel, but only trying

to think it out; only trying to see my way through this haze."

- "To think about keeping this dear sweet home, my own Guy?" asked Alice, coaxingly.
- "No," said Guy, rather impatiently, "thinking how to avoid dishonorable debt! You must see, Alice, that we can't stay here."
 - "I can't see why, Guy, darling."
- "But I can, Alice; it would be wicked and dishonest. Once for all, we are going to leave this day fortnight. The little house I have taken is neither ugly nor inconvenient; it is one-third the rent of this, and we can there do with one servant."
- "One servant!" cried Alice, "Oh, Guy! you are trying me sorely, how can I go through such drudgery, it will kill me!"
- "It is to be done, it shall be done," said Guy sternly; "let us talk no more of it, Alice. I will lighten your burdens as much as I can, but these murmurs, these lamentations, must cease;

mark me, they must!" He rose and left the room. Poor Alice resumed her bysterics.

Alice loved her husband, loved him devotedly, but she caused him more sorrow, more weariness of spirit, than a less loving and more worldly woman would have caused.

CHAPTER XXIV.

RACHEL THROWS AWAY HER HAPPINESS.

GUY and Alice laid aside their grandeur just when the autumn trees began to throw down their glories. The new little house, however, was so bright, so elegant even in its simplicity, that Alice was delighted beyond measure, forgot all her regrets, and danced like a sunbeam from room to room, with childish screams of pleasure. She was quite convinced now, that Guy was right to have given up the old house; it was so ugly, quite ugly compared to this one! Still Guy was sad and full of half-hidden anxieties.

Twenty times I had it on my lips to say to vol. 1.

them, "Guy and Alice, and the little life hanging upon you, come to me in my home, and I can and will make your days smooth and happy!" Oftener yet was the wish to have them under my roof brooding in my heart. Had there been but a little snow scattered on my head, had not Guy and I from childhood upward, lived for so many years our Paul and Virginia life, till I had learnt to love him so fondly, that to root out that love had nearly cost me my reason; had it not been for these past pages of my heart's story, how happy we might have been together! But the world and Mrs. Belton would not have allowed it; they would not have believed that the great passionate love was really withered and dead, and friendly, sisterly regard keeping watch on the green grave.

Mrs. Belton had watched over us with assiduous care, gathering up the veriest crumbs of gossip that accidentally fell in her way, dropping in on us now and then, to pay an apparently friendly visit, but never departing without leav-

ing some sharp sting behind, skilfully, mercilessly thrust in on one's tenderest feelings.

Several times had our social scourge called on me; each time she had hinted, rather than said plainly, that she sympathized more than she could express with my "sad trial!" At first I supposed that she referred to Mr. Vincent's bankruptcy, as many supposed that I was At last, I could not help engaged to him. plainly understanding that she spoke of my feelings for Guy, "my old love," as she called him. Ah, why should one woman seek to torture another! one, too, that had never injured her, in thought, deed, or word. Yet Mrs. Belton did not hate me; on the contrary, I really think she had a sort of regard for me, but she could not resist the fascination of tormenting me, or any one else.

Unfortunately, when Mrs. Belton had spoken, Warford itself had spoken. On any other subject, I could have boldly looked Warford and Mrs. Belton in the face, and defied them, but this was real torture. What could I say but, "On my word and honor as a Christian lady, Mr. Rolfe never was my lover, never dreamt of me in such a light. You do not, you cannot, know how you are distressing and paining me."

"Well, my dear," answered Mrs. Belton, "it is all very pretty, and proper too, that you should say so now, being the poor little wife's friend, and all that sort of thing; but I know, and all Warford knows!" and shaking her head and finger in measured time, she departed, leaving me in a flood of tears, which Mr. Vincent came in just in time to witness. Mr. Vincent was a shade less confident in manner than usual, but his person was as carefully dressed, and his countenance was as little impressed as possible In fact, his ready invention by his late reverses. had already discovered the means of extricating himself from his embarrassments. His words were rather franker and more cordial than usual; he pressed my hand, and expressed a hope that

there were no reverses in my quarter! What could be the cause of my tears!

- "No reverses whatever, thank you," I replied,
 but as a doctor, I dare say you will prove my
 best adviser. I have sat up two or three nights
 with Alice's baby; I have been very anxious and
 now am nervous, as you see. Be so good as to
 prescribe for me."
- "Mr. Vincent took me literally; asked for pen, ink, and paper, and wrote a prescription. His extreme coolness did me good; there was something in him repressive of all emotion. I knew well with whom I had to deal, and though this man had been my professed lover, I handed him his fee. "Thank you, Miss Arden; you have only to follow this prescription, take air and exercise, live regularly, and avoid all excitement; you will certainly then enjoy excellent health."
- "Thank you, Mr. Vincent, I will endeavour to profit by your advice."
 - "Miss Arden, you are a woman of sense, a

reasonable woman, the only reasonable woman I ever knew."

- "Thank you for the compliment."
- "Ah! hem! you remember, Miss Arden, when I did you—did myself, I mean, the honor to—to propose an alliance between us?"
- "Certainly, Mr. Vincent. I hope I thanked you at the time,"
- "You did, you did, but you refused me, Miss Arden! I was not offended, for I know very well that had not the ground been pre-occupied, you would, yes, you would have answered very differently," and Mr. Vincent drew himself up to his utmost height, i. e., five feet five.
- "You are mistaken, Mr. Vincent," said I quietly. "I did not refuse you on account of any other person."
- "Ab, I am glad to hear that," said he, looking in the glass, "I understand it all now. Report says—but hang report! I took your 'no' too soon! that is the truth, is it not?"

- "Mr. Vincent, I said 'no,' because I meant 'no '!"
- "Dear me, Miss Arden! I can't conceive your reason."
 - "You can't?"
 - "No, indeed I can't."
 - "Must I tell you again?"
 - "You have never told me yet."
- "Frankly, this is not the time I should choose to tell you anything disagreeable."
- "Miss Arden, the man who has been made a bankrupt, has nothing worse to hear! I am curious to know your reason."
- "My reason, Mr. Vincent, was—that I did not love you."
 - "You surprise me!"
 - "I dare say I do."
- "But after all," said Mr. Vincent, musingly, but still coolly, while he looked alternately at me and his own face in the glass, "I don't see the inseparable connexion between love and marriage!"

- "You don't? well, never mind, Mr. Vincent; happily we are not obliged to agree on the subject, nor are we bound to discuss it, such a theme must seem very trifling when your mind is of course preoccupied by many anxious cares."
- "Preoccupied, yes, but I am usually master of myself, I dare say you know that?" He had forgotten the late scene with his sister, though what he said was true in the general. "Now, my dear Miss Arden, I must tell you I have a plan which will set everything right, for you, for me, for all of us!"
- "Indeed! but there is nothing wrong with me, thank you"
- "Yes, there is; all Warford is talking of you and Guy Rolfe."
- "Then may God help the innocent, and defend the right!" I exclaimed, starting up.
- "Gently, gently, my dear Miss Arden, now pray speak calmly; this is a matter for coolness."
- "Coolness, Sir! when my feelings and honor are outraged?"

"Dear me! dear me! what creatures women are! Did I not tell you to keep calm and quiet? Did I not tell you I had a scheme for setting everything right? Now do be reasonable and listen. You are slandered; pray, pray be calm! I am—yes, I am a bankrupt; my sister and her husband are in a bad way. Something must be done. It was all this brought me here to-day. We must get married!"

"Married!" I exclaimed. "Of whose marriage are you speaking, Mr. Vincent?"

"Of whose? why, of yours and mine to be sure! we must get married, let this house, pay off the worst of my debts, and then I shall have no objections—no, not the least in the world—to your lending Rolfe and Alice a hundred pounds, of course on security, and with fair interest; or even allowing them twenty or thirty pounds a-year for the present, as the child is your god-daughter."

"Lending! allowing! Mr. Vincent, what are you talking of to me?"

"Of the only means of setting us all right,

Miss Arden. When you are my wife, the gossips will be for ever silenced; Guy and Alice will be better off, and we can set the whole at defiance, including Warford, and Mrs. Belton."

I turned from Mr. Vincent with disgust: Was this the honest man whose love I had vowed to my dying mother to accept? No! no! a thousand noes; he brought me no love, no faith, no tenderness; no, only a huckster's bargain. I was to sell myself to redeem my name; he to sell himself for my little income, scarcely reaching three hundred a-year. Guy and Alice might profit a little by the sale, or barter, if Guy's pride would stoop to such a transaction. I could not speak at first.

"Pray, Miss Arden, compose yourself," said Mr. Vincent. "I did hope you were superior to these little feminine weaknesses, but as you consent——"

"No! no, you have mistaken me; I never said, never meant such a thing as——"

"Never mind, we understand each other,

Rachel," and he came nearer, so near that I felt rather than saw, that he was going to embrace me.

I drew back gasping, between disgust and indignation, for once again I say, it was not the frank offer of an honest man's love that I was rejecting; I was but refusing to make one in an odious bargain.

"Don't be afraid," said Mr. Vincent with a smile of cool impudence; "I will take no advantage of our present position towards each other. You know I am a man of business; I merely want to say we need no longer use ceremony between us. Can you oblige me with a little loan? at interest of course, five per cent., say, till we make our final arrangements. Don't sell out for the purpose though, but any loose cash you happen to have; you understand me?"

"Perfectly, Mr. Vincent," said I, looking straight in his face, "I understand you now so well, that I speak plainly. I will never be your wife, but as regards the money, I am quite willing to accommodate you, as Alice's brother. Mr. Rolfe has charge of all my affairs, I will request him to give you what you require."

- "But my dear Miss Arden-"
- "No more, Mr. Vincent; if we prolong our discussion my fee will have been expended use-lessly! Good-bye, I wish you every success in your next speculation!"

CHAPTER XXV.

RACHEL MAKES A RESOLUTION.

Mr. VINCENT was wise in his generation after all, he pocketed my insult and my money, and departed from Warford, satisfied, smiling and contented, leaving his practice, his house, his furniture, etc., to indemnify his creditors.

Guy and Alice were going on pretty well in their new house; the novelty and wonder had gone off, consequently Alice's ecstacy was decreased, still, she was more easily satisfied than she had been. She loved her child, adored her husband, and Guy's face began to show a more settled happiness than I had known in it for long years. I had tried very hard to lead Alice to see how much her comfort and repose would be increased by a better-managed and more orderly house. She seemed convinced, and I did my best to render her task of amendment easier.

I had a plan in my head, which I had been revolving since my conversation with Mr. Vincent, it was, to root up all old wishes and feelings, and to turn my face away from the scenes which through childhood and youth had been so inexpressibly dear to me, to divorce the past from me.

The words were ever ringing in my ears, "All Warford is talking of you and Guy."

It seemed cruel that I must leave the grave of my father and my mother, to wander forth among strangers,—to unfamiliar scenes wherein my heart could find no home; and all through the slanderous tongue of one woman! she who had lit the quick-burning flame of evil report!

My grief was not purely selfish. I thought with bitter regret of those I should leave behind,

of Guy's diminished comforts, of poor Alice's short-comings and helpless tears, with no one at hand to fill up the ones and hide the others, of the little creature that already lisped out "Aunt Rachie," and turned instinctively to me for the supply of its little wants.

It seemed to me that had honor or conscience bade me, had I found in my heart one lingering unworthy feeling, I would have fled from Warford for ever; but no, I had not to fly from my own weakness, only from other people's persecution.

Mr. Vincent had altered our old home considerably, still it was recognizable. A large board was hanging out before it, stating that the house was "To let, with immediate possession." The door stood open; I wandered in. "Let me see my father's room and the garden, please," I said to the woman in charge. "Surely, Miss, and perhaps you'd like to go over the house alone?" "Indeed I should like it."

I passed through into the garden, and the

summer-house wherein I had so often talked with my childhood's friend. It made me live over the past again.

Heaven alone knows what I had suffered under the shadow of those trees, wandering up and down those quiet walks, whose very stillness mocked the storm within me.

But I had striven; I had conquered. God knows how I had striven, He who gave me strength to conquer.

· I often think now, as I walk through the world, of what may be going on in other hearts. Perhaps some people that we think cold and selfish, and evil-tempered, may have had, like me, a hard battle to fight with some lonely sorrow, and may have come out from the conflict scarred and maimed, and scorched by the fire of the foe. Perhaps the woman one shuns—sometimes the woman with the scowling brow and the clamorous tongue—may be one of these, and has a right to our pity and our patience!

But these were not my thoughts then.

I went slowly up the old familiar stairs, and lingered in each room, till I reached the dusty garret. Like the humblest human beings, the poorest chamber was least altered by time!

There lay the dust and rubbish of old days, there was the cobwebbed rafter, and the dusty window from which I had so often looked out over the houses, to the wide extended country, even to the distant hill-tops. I gazed once more on the well-known scene, and though I sought it not, my eye fell, too, on the interior of the law office opposite.

That was little changed, save that the grey-haired man, who used to write at the higher desk, was absent, as he frequently was now, and that Guy sat on the high, uncomfortable stool, writing. His pen ran rapidly over the paper, as though he were in haste to finish some business matter, but presently he laid it aside, and bent his head down on the desk, on his folded arms. Was it from weariness of his actual task? or was it from weariness of spirit, of a tired head

and heart? or, again, was it that some fresh perplexity or sorrow had arisen for him? No action has ever seemed to me so indicative of mental fatigue, or of mental pain.

Poor Guy! Still so young in years, yet husband, father, care-worn man; still so little removed by time from the bright-haired boy with whom I had chased butterflies in the fields! Oh, Guy! Guy! friend, brother! Why was I to cease to help thee bear thy burden, and to soften thy cares?

That very night, sitting by my friends' hearth, I talked to them of my plans. I wanted a change, I had never seen the capital of our country, the capital of the world! I was going to London for a few weeks, perhaps months.

Alice heard all this with outcries and lamentations; she knew not what would become of her without me; it was almost as bad as if Guy went away; what would become of baby, what would become of her? Finally, she wiped her eyes, and begged me to send her the pattern of a mantle, and "a couple of cheap, simple dresses, muslins, dear, suitable you know to this little house, and keeping one servant, and all that sort of thing; a running pattern, darling Rachel, and a little trimming, gimp or lace, which will cost next to nothing!"

At first Guy heard of my plans in silence, but he seemed examining my face as he had never done before. At last he spoke, "It will be the greatest loss, if you go, dear Rachel, to Alice, to baby, to all of us; but, setting aside selfish regrets, I am glad to hear of this scheme. You are certainly out of health, you need a change; besides, you ought to see London."

- "Do you think so, Mr. Rolfe?"
- "Brother Guy does, Rachel. You have lived too much for others, it is time you began to think of yourself."

Then we talked of other things. Alice had her little household troubles to tell; how the tax-gatherer had come dunning, how the solitary maid had burnt a pie, and broken a plate! and

how, when she had given baby the best China vases to play with on the carpet, she had knocked one against the fender and smashed it! "And they were so very pretty," lamented Alice, "and a wedding gift, too! such a shame, and what could she do to prevent baby destroying things?"

"Don't give her good things to play with," said I.

"I whipped her for breaking the first vase," said Alice, naively, "but it did no good; she cracked the second just afterwards."

"But that was cruel and unjust," said Guy,
"since you put the things in her hands! Poor
little pet," he added, hanging with a sort of
pitying tenderness over the child in the cradle,
"the world will lay stripes enough upon thee,
little lamb; our hands should only fall upon thee
in blessings! Rachel, do you remember the
book we read aloud, the winter before I was
married? There's a dying man in it, who says,
'The world has been too many for me!' Ah,

how expressive that phrase is! It seems to me that when I die I shall say the world has been 'too many for me!'"

"Oh, don't talk of dying!" cried Alice, throwing herself into her hushand's arms, with a shudder, "I hate to talk, I hate to hear, of death!"

"Do you, you poor child?" said Guy, gently stroking the pretty, child-like head, over which golden curls clustered. "Well, then, we will talk of something else. What shall it be, little Alice? Shall we tell fairy stories of King Arthur? or read a legend of the Rhine, about the old mouldy tower with rats and a wicked bishop?"

"Don't tease me, Guy!" said Alice, between tears and smiles.

"Tease you, poor child! I never thought of such a thing. Let us talk of London, then, and the sights that Rachel is so soon to see for the first time. Tell us, when you write, Rachel, how the big dome wears, and if Wellington's statue at Hyde Park Corner looks as much like a spectre steed in the misty mornings as it used to look. I spent a few months myself in the big city once, you know, and saw the old Abbey, and the Tower, and the axe that smote off Anne Boleyn's slender neck, and the instruments of torture from the Armada, and all those pleasant things. See how naturally my mind turns to cheerful subjects! By the way, Rachel, Mrs. Belton is among our new clients."

"Mrs. Belton!" I repeated, feeling my face very hot.

"Yes; she gave me a quantity of gossip besides my six and eightpence," and Guy looked at me sadly, though he smiled. Ah! well, I knew then why he had said I had better go to visit London.

CHAPTER XXVI.

RACHEL'S DREAMS IN THE NEW CITY.

To be alone in London is very sad; especially sad it is when the shadow of the great city falls upon one without a friend within reach, to whom we can now and then fly, when we are struck with the unaccustomed misery or mirth we meet at every turn.

In vain I told myself that I ought to be very thankful to see London as a mere casual visitor, enduring no enforced fatigue, subject to no painful privations; and yet there were moments when I could have wished it had been otherwise.

I lay waking the first night in my lonely

lodging, and, in imagination, going through a series of romantic adventures.

I fancied myself the penniless daughter of a poor curate, and that I had come up to London to find employment and bread. I was, of course, going to be a governess; what else can a poor lady be? I must go the next morning, very humbly, to an agency, nay, to all the scholastic agencies I could find, to enquire for a situation. I should advertise in the Times, and make out a fabulous list of accomplishments. I should see a number of haughty ladies, who would search me through and through, with eyes and tongues. I should be, by turns, humble and proud, tearful I should pass long, dreary months and indignant. of waiting sorrow and privation. In my painful researches I should walk till I grew footsore, like the Israelites in the desert, and till, like theirs, my vesture should grow old and tattered, even as worn as my spirit. I should, at last, be "placed," a stranger among strangers, eating the crust of charity, and that wet with tears. I should go on

for years—years, with one goal always before my eyes, the means of purchasing my freedom. I should eagerly, yet carefully, lay up coin after coin, as the slave toiled to gather his peculium in old Rome to purchase his freedom.

I should creep to my hoard day after day to watch if it grew, and to wonder how long it would be before I should be able to buy myself. Meanwhile my nose and elbows would grow red and sharp, my hair thin and grey, my temper peevish, my voice harsh, my heart rather hardened, between the anvil and the hammer.

I should have my little romance, of course, all governesses have. I should fall in love with some one above me, and then—ah! then would come sorrow and tears, sorrow the deeper, tears the more bitter, because they must be hidden. The object of my sentimental adoration would amuse himself at my expense; he would regard me as thrown in his way by a lucky chance, below his habitual companions, just above the household female attendants; I should be to him

the pastime of his idle leisure; and I should, for a time, believe the jest earnest, and, for a brief space, become intoxicated as on a giddy height of hope and happiness. Then the gorgeous palace fancy had raised would crumble into dust, and I should awake to reality, but sigh over the vanished cheat.

Then would come cold, dark days, when feeling should grow numb, and all earth would look a dry waste. Presently the governess days would be dead and gone, my hair would be greyer, I should begin to wear untimely spectacles. I should count my savings a little less eagerly than formerly, for freedom would have lost its charm.

Presently I should rent a stiff old-maidish house, and open a school, and go on teaching, teaching, as those do who have taught so many years that the mind works in its one grove so mechanically that it could almost run through its allotted task asleep as well as awake. Then would follow real old age, when heart and frame would be equally cold and stiff in a lonely life,

and the lonely life would wind up with the lonely death, and a nameless grave-stone.

What a strange faculty was this, that made me capable of imagining myself what I had never been, never could be.

It was a winter night; my room, though well furnished, looked cold and cheerless in the faint glimmer of a little lamp. I shivered and almost fancied my waking dreams real.

Then came a feeling of gratitude that I was not the melancholy being I had pictured myself, and of whom I had so often read in story-books. Determined to dispel the last lingering impression of such dreams, I rose, and throwing my cloak round me, I proceeded to set light to the cold preparations for a fire, which the grate showed.

Returning to my bed, and still sleepless, as one is in a strange place, I leant on my elbow and watched the ascending flame. Long ere it conquered the hard black stone, the improved

cheerfulness of all around me had put the governess vision to flight, but still I was conscious of a dull, aching pain in the secret chamber of my heart, which made me wonder whether it might not have been better and happier for me, had a real, hard fight for bread and life lain before me.

There is always something that charms the imagination in possible, coming adventures; unless to the timid mind, the unknown has always a degree of fascination, and we usually look forward to a struggle with a certain amount of pride and confidence.

Ah! how charming, despite hunger, and weariness, and tears, must have been the visions of Whittington, when sitting on the stone outside the new, unknown city, he heard the bells ring forth their prophecy, "Turn again, Whittington, Lord Mayor of London!"

I really regretted that no strife, no struggle, lay before me! What adventures had I to expect? What lay before me but common-place

sight-seeing? Neither friendship nor community of feeling with any one.

I need not look for adventures; all that could happen would be the breaking down of a cab, or having my pocket picked by a very commonplace thief, in an omnibus.

Thus thinking and dreaming, I saw the flames expend themselves; the fire sank into a dull, deep red, and I fell asleep to dream.

But, strange to say, I entered a new world of imagery. My sleeping thoughts did not fly back to Warford, nor to the objects of interest I had left there.

My old life, with its associations, seemed utterly divorced from me, a new one appeared opening before my vision, entirely new, and equally surprising. First, I saw again my late travelling companions; the selfish politician, wrapped up in his cloak and newspaper, who would forcibly shut the carriage window, without, consulting the pleasure and convenience of any one but himself. The equally selfish woman,

who would insist on its being open, without thinking of any taste or wish but her own. The commercial traveller, who ogled me impudently; and the little girl, who looked in my face first, then slid one hand into mine, the other into my basket, to take an apple.

Then the scene changed. I was as nothing in my vision, but I saw as in a tableau something I had never dreamed, even waking.

I was gazing, as one might gaze on a scene at the play (a sort of thing I had never then seen), into a chamber, something between a student's library and an artist's studio. Sketches and models were scattered here and there, but yet more books, maps, charts, and papers.

The owner of all these was sitting at a writing table, pen in hand. As I looked upon him, he raised his head, and a nobler face I could never conceive than that of the student. Shall I describe it? I scarcely think I can; or, if I did, it would sound so exactly like a thousand descriptions I have read, which conveyed nothing

to my mind, and would probably convey nothing to another. Still, I will say it was a wonderfully beautiful face, not only from its fine features, but from the soul which shone through, and literally illumined the whole, like a lamp behind a transparent statue.

He might have been an artist, or musician, but he certainly was chiefly a poet, and the sheet of paper before him he was evidently filling with some inspired song, that would one day make human hearts beat. Presently the poet arose, and I saw that, though he stooped a little, he was tall and finely formed.

Then,—oh, wonder! he came to me, and, with a gentle smile, put the song he had written into my hands, and told me it was for me. For me? impossible! but he added words that made my doubts vanish; he told me that he loved me.

And then there entered into my heart one of those sudden, strange, new-born loves that romancers describe, but that we seldom see, the love born at first sight, kindled of a sudden, as by a spark from heaven!

I felt inexpressibly happy; happy with the troubled joy of one who looks on a beautiful vision, but trembles all the while lest it should vanish into thin air, and "leave no wreck behind."

Alas! my charming dream faded, faded away; the sun streamed in on my dazzled eyes, and in the dusty sunbeam stood my stout landlady, in a brown stuff gown, asking whether I would like "heggs" or "am" for breakfast. Alas! I found I was a mere woman; when I sighed regretfully over my dream, and the lost vision of the poet, and I wondered if such beings existed out of dreamland.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A REAL ADVENTURE AND MORE DREAMS.

I had no friends in London; I could not have been more alone in the world had I really come to ask permission to earn my bread.

My parents had had no near relatives, and had been for many years cut off from all former connexions or acquaintance with the great city. I had, consequently, nothing to expect in the way of companionship.

I tried to banish this idea of loneliness, and, as I was young, my mind was naturally somewhat touched with an interest and curiosity which went beyond the great dome and the spectral horse.

The day after my arrival in London, I arose with full determination to proceed methodically to work, and to begin my inspection of objects about which I knew as little as I did of the Sahara. Dear reader, I, poor little country maiden, did not know then that sight-seeing was vulgar; I fancy that many people, in my position in life, do not yet know that great fact.

I went out intending to go to the National Gallery, but a more deeply interesting London sight was reserved for me first. A ragged urchin stopped me on the road, and deluded me into a baker's shop, and then into a wretched cellar in Drury Lane, where his mother lay dying in consumption, and his sister was making what they call "slop work" shirts, at two pence half-penny a piece!

The woman had a hectic cheek and glittering eye; she was not absolutely confined to bed by her disease; no, only kept there by cold, the cold which pinched her daughter's red fingers while she worked.

Poor mother: the heavy mangle which rested in the corner, had been her death, her slow and sure death; dragging round the handle hour after hour, day after day, month after month, year after year, to give her children bread.

At last the weak arms could drag the load no more, and dropped down, helpless, dying, and the family had to live on the girl's work, till at last the mother had sent out the youngest born to get a few pence, as he could; he was to sweep a crossing; but the boy was eight years old, the broom was heavy, perhaps he really lost it, as he said, when he fell asleep on the door step.

So the child took to begging, and in time the arab of the street learnt to play pitch-and-toss, and the petty gambling too often diverted the half-pence that should have been carried to his mother.

But the boy vagrant had still a heart, and, arab though he had grown, he determined when he saw tears on his mother's cheek, that he would help her; his first attempt to do that, was to pick my pocket! I caught the urchin in the very fact, and in my virtuous indignation I hastily called a policeman.

However, I was always wanting in firmness of a certain kind; and when the little wretch whimpered out piteously "Mother's sick and dying, and what's worser, starving; I did it for her, I did! There now, let me go! let me go! let me go! I was weak and silly enough to say, "Yes, let him go!"

- "Beg pardon, Miss," said the intelligent policeman, with a sort of contemptuous civility, "but it's plain you're from the country; you see we 'London people' are sharper, we are."
 - "But his mother is dying," I remonstrated.
- " Most likely he aint got no mother, the young varmint."
- "But I 'ave, I 'ave got a mother, and she's dying, she is! Let me go; oh, let me go."

Those must have been genuine tears that rolled down the the nine-years'-old cheeks; oh, if they were not, may God keep me from that state of mind, in which it is impossible to be deluded!

I bribed the policeman with five shillings, to give up the little criminal to me, and I then bade the boy lead me to his mother.

I have no doubt he was grateful, and that he tried to shew his gratitude in his own peculiar way, by helping me over the crossings, always remembering that the policeman had said I was from the country. He took care to keep on the side where my pocket was not, either from instinctive honor, or to inspire me with confidence, or it might be to put himself out of the way of temptation.

That which struck my country imagination as curious, was the fact that my companion showed no shame for his late delinquency; the moment the heavy hand of the law, embodied in that of the policeman, was taken off him, and his fears were at rest, he looked up boldly and smilingly into my face, and, to my inexperienced mind, that look was innocent!

I talked with him, heard his whole story, a story told with some pathos and more humour, till I learnt to know that the little wanderer of the London streets, was really and truly older than I.

When I stood in his mother's wretched dwelling, a good deal of the truth of his story was confirmed by my first glance at the half clad and wasted form that lay on the wretched bed, convulsed with coughing, while scarcely a spark of fire glimmered in the grate. There were not three articles of furniture in the room, or cellar, and certainly no indication of food, unless it were the remains of a stale loaf of bread. I had said that the boy thief had shown no shame, but when he entered his mother's presence, he coloured crimson, and looked at me so pleadingly; surely that look meant "Don't tell the dying creature there that her boy is a thief. I can let all London know it, and look them impudently in the face, but her, no-not her!"

By the time I left the wretched family, they looked less hopeless; but the light had grown dim for the glorious pictures in the Gallery, and its sombre rooms looked even more gloomy than I have ever seen them look since.

I stood a few minutes before the dead Christ, and wondered why it was when the God-man suffered thus for us, suffered for us so much beyond the power of human conception or description, why all who are called by the holy name of the Common Redeemer, don't love and pity one another. Why some of his disciples should roll in triumphant chariots of gold and purple along the high-way of life, while others are perishing of hunger, and have famine, and perhaps even crime, to bear their pall at last. Yet-the great loving Father that has made us, is more pitiful than man, and has prepared shelter and shade for his way-farers when the toilsome march is over.

On my way back to my lodgings on that day, I wandered out of my road, and lost myself among the palaces of the rich, in the large squares. Ah, truly I felt when I came forth from among them, that I had seen the great city in one day: the poor clay feet on which the Colossus stands, the proud golden head above them. Then I thought of the beautiful fable of the Sandal and the Crown; the haughty crown reproaching the humble Sandal with the words, "What dost thou crawling in the mire?" and the modest Sandal answering "I am enabling thee to keep above, in the pure air, I am abased that thou may'st be exalted!"

I had seen the springs of life in the heart of London, and I marvelled how the rich can sleep in peace on their own beds? unless those noble souls that have bought the right to sweet repose and happy dreams, by ministering to their suffering brethren.

I longed to be rich; but I consoled myself with the thought, that even with restricted means, I might scatter some crumbs of happiness and contentment around me. The sights of that one day had wearied me greatly, and I sat in my solitude alternately looking into the fire and

tracing pictures there, and reading passages in an interesting new book, which, however, had not the power to engross me wholly.

It was partly the words before me, partly the remembrances of the day, which made me seek and find fire pictures, wherein much of the past seemed shown, and the future might be shadowed out.

Guy and Alice, and my little nursling seemed beside me, like spirit visitants, almost as if they had quitted earth; and in the empty chairs opposite, I could fancy the forms of my father and mother smiling pensively upon me.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE LANDLADY AND INMATES OF NO. — SLOANE STREET.

When the landlady entered with my tea, I could not refrain from asking her to stop a few minutes, and to tell me something of the neighbourhood. I saw that it was old, and I fancied that it must be interesting.

Mrs. Brown misunderstood my queries; she seated herself with a very satisfied air, and smoothed her black stuff apron, while she began to discourse.

"Well, miss, I beg your pardon, ma'am, but I suppose you're not married?"

- "No, I am not."
- "Well, then, it's most natural that you should like to know about your neighbours."
- "The neighbourhood, Mrs. Brown,—Chelsea, I mean."
- "Oh, yes, to be sure, Miss; the young man, top front room, that you see on the stairs is, as far as I know—"
- "But I have seen no young man on the stairs."
- "Well, never mind, Miss, you will soon see him,—the young man with the genteel air and the varnished boots; e's a clerk at Mr. Twining's 'e is."
 - " But--"
 - "'E's not a good match, Miss, not at all."
- "I should think not," said I, gravely, "as he wears varnished boots."
- "And 'e smokes a fortune in segars, 'e does. I 'ope you won't think of 'im, though 'e is very genteel and 'andsome."

I suppose I ought to have been very angry,

but I could not be so. I laughed very heartily, and my laugh drove away all the gracious shadows that had surrounded me, and seemed to shatter the last lingering images in the fire.

- "No, I won't think of him, most decidedly," I answered, with all seriousness, "but probably he would not think of me, Mrs, Brown."
- "Most likely not, Miss," said Mrs. Brown in a fit of serious musing, "'e 'as a great eye for smart dressing."
 - "Ah, well, mine is not smart at all," said I.
 - "Well, Miss, it aint,—I 'ope no offence?"
- "None at all, Mrs. Brown. But you have a lady in the house, I think,—who is she?"
 - "Oh, that's the first floor, Miss."
 - "The first floor?"
- "Yes, we always call her so; part because she lives first floor, part because she's lofty in 'er ways sometimes, part because I can't for the life of me, say 'er name. She's English by 'er tongue, though she uses odd words; but she calls her name Madam Seraphin,—something

beginning with a N. I've nothing to say agin her, nothing at all, for she lives reg'lar and pays reg'lar,—but she is queer, that I will say. She wants me to stand up for woman's rights, she does. Now I've stood up for them all my life, and, what's more, I've had them. poor, dear 'usband, bless 's 'eart, wanted to get 'is own way sometimes, but, bless you, Miss, 'e never did get it. Never. I'd my own way, and 'is way too; and if I only so much as looked at 'im, e'd say, as meek as a lamb, 'Well, my dear, you know best,-I dare say you know best.' When I was cook and 'ousekeeper to Sir John, and my lady, if Sir John said, "I'll 'ave the brown 'orses to-day, Thomas," didn't my lady say, quite mild like, but for all that, determined, 'No, Thomas, the greys;' and Thomas dared as soon 'ave leaped in the fire, as taken out the brown 'orses after that. Madam Seraphin says I've no soul, but for all that I'm a baptized Christian, and no Turk neither. She wants me to go to meetings for woman's rights! "Who'll cook your chop, ma'am," says I," if I go to meetings? and you like it nice and brown, with a leetle pepper! 'Yes,' says Madam, 'and not forgetting the Reading sauce, Mrs. Brown. I want supper when I work so 'ard for my own sex, and combat for their rights.'"

"Is Madam Seraphin an author?" I asked.

"Oh, yes; and writes books on all sorts of subjects. I never read one of them, though. I've got on very comfortable without books so far, and I don't see why I should worret about them now. What good comes of all this learning? Then, Miss, there's the gentleman we call second floor,—'e's very quiet and pleasant, never talks much, to be sure, but 'as always a smile. I've only one thing against him."

"And what may that be?" I asked.

"Why, ma'am, 'e never asks nor answers a question. Bless you, I don't know more of his 'istory than I did three years ago, when first he set foot in this house;'e seldom 'as a visitor, and when 'e has, they don't seem to talk above their

breath, leastway, I don't hear nothing at all; not that I'd listen, but it does look suspicious never to be over'eard. He gets a 'eap of letters, and he writes ever so many, besides other things; but I don't know what they are. Not me? He mostly locks them up, but he sometimes leaves some verses about. I don't care to look at them—'ere's some I picked up in the passage; it seems sad, stupid stuff;" and she drew a crushed paper from her pocket, on which I read, supposing it lawful to read such MS.:—

UNCROWNED KINGS.

Oh ye uncrowned, but kingly kings!
Made royal by the brain and heart,
Of all Earth's wealth the noblest part,
Yet reckoned nothing in the mart
Where men know nought but sordid things,
All hail to ye, most kingly Kings!

Oh ye uncrowned, but kingly Kings!
Whose breath and words of living flame
Have waked slaved nations from their shame,
And bade them rise in manhood's name;
Swift as the curved bow backwards spring,
To follow ye, most kingly Kings.

Oh ye uncrowned, but kingly Kings!
Whose strong right arm hath oft been bared;

Who God-inspired, have noblest dared Where fires of righteous battles glared: To think on ye, the heart up-springs, Oh ye uncrowned, but kingly Kings!

Oh ye uncrowned, but kingly Kings!
Whose burning songs, like lava poured,
Have smitten like a two-edged sword,
Sent forth by Heaven's avenging Lord
To purge the Earth, where serfdom clings
To all but ye, oh kingly Kings!

Oh ye uncrowned, but kingly Kings!
To whose extatic gaze alone
The beautiful by Heaven is shown,
And who have made it all your own;
Your lavish hand around us flings
Earth's richest wealth, oh noble Kings!

Oh ye uncrowned, but kingly Kings!
The heart leaps wildly at your thought,
And the brain fires, as if it caught
Shreds of your mantle: ye have fought,
Not vainly, if your glory brings
A lingering light to Earth, oh Kings!

Oh ye uncrowned, but kingly Kings!
Whose souls on Marah's fruit did sup,
And went in fiery chariots up,
When each had drained his hemlock cup—
Ye friends of God, but tyrant's strings
Uncrowned, yet still the kingliest Kings!

"Your lodger is a poet, then? said I.

"Yes, 'e's a poet, or a traveller for a 'ouse, or something like that, poor thing. You know,

Miss, advertisements are often in verses—Mr. Moses' always are. Second floor's coat is shabby enough for anything; but I can't say 'e ever runs in debt."

Here a bell ringing interrupted the landlady. "Bless me, if that 'aint second floor 'isself aringing, and 'e's coming downstairs, that 'e is," on which she ran into the passage in a violent hurry, and I heard a pleasant voice saying—

- "I'm sorry to disturb you, Mrs. Brown, but--..."
- "No disturbance, Sir, not the least. I was only talking to the front parlour."
 - "The front parlour?"
- "The young lady there, Sir, I mean; a most pleasant young lady, I assure you."
- "I wanted to tell you I shall be out to-night, Mrs. Brown," continued the voice. "I am going to the theatre, and may be late. Don't be frightened if you hear the latch-key. Good night."

"That's the second floor, Miss," said the laudlady, returning; "'e's very pleasant, but no great things to look at,—but I do wish you could see him; perhaps you'd just come and look at his likeness."

The voice and the verses had excited my interest, or curiosity, or both. I followed my conductress, supposing that she was leading me to some unknown regions of her own, but, instead of that, I soon found myself in the apartments of "second floor." The gas was turned down, so as to cast only a feeble light around; but Mrs. Brown suddenly inundated the chamber with a dazzling splendour. I could scarcely suppress a cry of surprise and fear when I found myself in the very study of which I had lately dreamed. All the objects that had struck my imagination in sleep there lay scattered, even to the copy of verses lying on the table.

There was but one thing wanting, the noblelooking student, leaning over the desk, from the high-backed carved oaken chair. "'Ere's the second floor," interrupted my landlady, "'e's a little too thin for good looks," and she held up a photo to the light. Amazement! it was my hero—the hero of my dreams—my poet!

I started with something of superstitious fear, something that whispered to me that a new foundationless romance was springing up in my fancy, if not in my heart—a romance that would one day fall into miserable ruins.

"Don't start, Miss," said the landlady, "that noise you 'ear is only the supper-beer going 'is rounds." I looked surprised. "The boy from the public that carries it, you know; first floor is sure to want some porter."

Alas! how my airy fabric of romance and mystery tottered at these words; how the whole fairy edifice crumbled into dust, when there flashed across my mind that I had really been in that room before, independently of all visions, a circumstance entirely forgotten in consequence

of my having ascended many similar staircases in the course of my lodging-hunting, though it had so happened that I had returned to and chosen the first apartments I had seen.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AN OLD FAMILIAR FACE.

IT was in a shop in Regent Street that my eye fell on an old familiar face. I was purchasing a frock for little Alice, when my attention was attracted to a beautiful boy, about four years old, picturesque alike in feature, costume, and attitude. The face was lovely, the bright golden hair was cut square across the forehead, and the rest fell in curls over the delicate lace vandykes, which surrounded his violet velvet dress.

The child's beauty fascinated me immediately, but there was something in him unnatural, and prematurely affected, which spoilt the picture. He was playing with the tassels hanging upon his mother's cloak; she turned round to rebuke him and her attendant maid, for carelessness. An irrepressibly sharp pain shot through my heart, as I recognized in the handsome, elegant woman before me, my old acquaintance, I will not say friend, Julia Darrel. To her old beauty, Julia added a great deal of acquired grace, and an air of fashion, unmistakeable even by my country eyes. I turned hastily away, with an instinctive feeling that I must avoid one for whom I had never experienced anything approaching esteem or affection, one of whom I should say that she inspired me with aversion, did I probe my woman's heart thoroughly, and tell all its sins, and weaknesses.

But Julia had seen me, and was not to be foiled in her intention of creating my wonder and admiration. "Ah, Rachel? is it possible? You away from the delightful, primitive shades of Warford? You, in wicked London, of all places in the world, how could you trust yourself here? But perhaps you are married?"

- "No, indeed I am not."
- "I was married, you know," said Julia.
- "Was?" I repeated.
- "Yes; poor Charlie has been dead nearly a year. Isn't my boy a beauty? Stand up, Cecil, show your face."
 - "Yes, he is beautiful, very beautiful."
 - "Like me, don't you think so?"
- "Yes, he is like you, like you every way; I should think his character the same."
- "You are your old self, Rachel? But what are you doing in London? are you seeking a---"
 - "Seeking nothing, but change of air."
- "Well, I am sure I beg your pardon, but I fancied you might be here for—I mean to look out for employment, as you haven't married. I thought you might be glad of teaching Cecil."
- "Thank you, I don't think I should do for a governess; besides, though far from rich, I am independent."

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- "I am very glad to hear it, for after all, you are not at all a likely person to marry."
- "I don't think I am." Just then we left the shop: I was going to say good bye.
- "No, no, we can't part thus; after all these years, I have so much to tell you, so much to ask; you will come home with me, I am staying at the Bath Hotel."
 - "Thank you, I cannot go with you."
 - "When will you come then, Rachel?"
 - "I cannot promise to come at all."
- "Now tell the truth, Rachel, you don't wish to come."
- "Frankly then, I do not; I wish to say nothing unkind, Julia, but you know our characters never assimilated."
- "Of course not, but contrasts are charming; I like them. Have you no other reason for avoiding me, Rachel?"
- "I have other reasons; seeing you, reminds me of so many painful things; it reminds me

how heartlessly you wrecked a life's happiness through your vanity."

- "Absurd! a lost love never breaks a heart."
- "But a lost faith may."
- "A lost faith!"
- "Yes; your injury to Guy Rolfe was not so much depriving him of your individual self, it was your destroying his belief in humanity!"
- "Now what a good-tempered creature I am, Rachel, to bear all this scolding! but I won't quarrel with you. I shall walk your way, as I see you are quite determined not to drive mine."

Julia walked on beside me, down Regent-street, leading her fair child by the hand, and actually holding up her face to be gazed upon by the passers by, her eyes sparkling, and her cheek flushed with pleasure at the casual admiration she excited. For some time she was too occupied to talk to me; at last she said, "Tell me all about Guy, please, Rachel."

"I wonder you can speak of him!"

- "Do you? you would not wonder if he had loved you instead of me."
 - "Julia, have you no shame?"
- "On this subject none; I can't help people admiring me, and loving me; I don't ask them to do it! I couldn't help Guy's loving me; it was no fault of mine if I didn't return his love."
- "But it was your fault if you deluded him into the belief that you were devoted to him, and then betrayed his trusting affection so cruelly. A man who acts thus is pointed at by the finger of scorn; should a woman show no honor, nor conscience! Is she free, because she is a woman, to trample on hearts like the stones beneath her feet?"
- "Don't let us say any more about it, Rachel; you are not—you never were in a position to judge me. But I hope Guy is well and happy, though I really am sorry to hear he married such a mere wax doll, such a baby-faced creature."
 - "Guy's wife is my friend, Julia."
- "Oh, indeed! kindred spirits I suppose; do you think her pretty?"

"She is very lovely."

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- "Does Guy really like her?"
- "He loves her and his child devotedly."

Julia bit her lip and frowned. "Guy never loved, never will love any woman but me, as long as he lives! What a poor little simpleton the woman must be, if she thinks the contrary."

- "You have been a wife, you are a mother, Julia; can you, dare you talk thus?"
- "Pshaw! I am no prude; why should I ignore a fact which everyone knows, that I am not a woman to be forgotten. I have had two duels fought about me since I went out to India. You don't know how nice it is living out there; a woman in that country, at least a pretty one, is in her sphere, quite a little queen. I used to have a dozen cavaliers, with as many side saddle horses in the morning and evening at our bungalow, to invite me to ride; and you should have seen how proud the man looked that I chose to attend me!"
 - "And your husband?"
 - "Oh, a little cross sometimes, not often though,

poor soul! The last year or two he didn't take much notice, he was too ill; he suffered a good deal—a horrid liver complaint—it made me very low spirited; I was obliged to go out often to divert my mind. He really was very good to me, and has left me a handsome income. By-the-by, I have never told you my name."

- "I know it?"
- "No, I fancy not; you probably never heard of my second marriage."
 - "Your second marriage?"
- "Yes; poor dear Harry only lived a year after we went out, and left me very badly provided for. It was no use coming back; I married the colonel of our own regiment, and was a little empress among the officers."
- "And all in so short a space of time!" I exclaimed involuntarily!
- "Yes, short enough, and I have just cast off the weeds for my second husband, and only think, I am only twenty-three now."

Julia rambled on thus till we reached my own

door in Sloane-street. I did not ask my companions to enter, but the poor child, despite his grand attire and precocious vanity, which he evidently gratified in displaying it, was getting tired, and he looked up pleadingly at me for the sympathy his mother did not give. I could not resist that look, "You must come in to rest your boy," said I.

"I suppose so, though your invitation is not very cordial, Rachel, I must say," said Julia, adding "I suppose I am very naughty, but every one has spoilt me, you know."

I led them in, rang for luncheon, then devoting my chief attention to the child's wants I let the stream of Julia's self-contained conversation flow on undisturbed.

- "Ah!" she exclaimed, snatching a photo that lay on a table, "Who is this?"
 - "My little god-daughter, Alice Rolfe."
 - "And this, the mother, I suppose?"
- "Yes, that is Alice, only not so pretty as she is, and of course a photo can give no idea of her

brilliant complexion, nor of her lovely eyes and hair."

"A pretty doll!" repeated Julia, a mere pretty doll. And here, of course, is Guy, tamed and subdued by a life-long regret, but a thousand times more interesting than in the old days." Julia gazed long and earnestly on the photo; what were her thoughts while she gazed, I know not; at last she laid down the portrait, returned to the table and took a glass of wine.

"After all it is pleasant to renew old memories," said she, "I should like to see the old place with its old-fashioned ways; it would have killed me to live there, but now that I am well provided for, I should like to see it for a change, as I can afford to indulge a little sentiment. You might spare me Guy's photo, Rachel?"

"Excuse me."

"Never mind; I'll write to him for one. Oh, by-the-bye, I am very thoughtless, there are dozens of people I ought to ask after, Mrs. Belton, for instance."

- "Is as inventive as ever."
- "The white old maid."
- " Is a happy wife."
- "What a silly old frump to marry at her age. Then Charles Lorrimore, my old flirt, before Guy."
 - "Married, a bankrupt, and dead!"
 - "Dead! how strange! He died young."
- "Yes, many do; we might, Julia, but for God's mercy!"
 - "Oh a Puritan in all senses still!" said Julia.
- "Well, I must say I should like to see Guy and old Warford again. Oh, I quite forgot; how's your mother?"
- "My mother? It is well with her, she is in heaven."
 - "And your father?"
 - "In death they were not divided."

It seemed profanation that Julia should pronounce those names.

But her mind quickly flew off again, and she enlarged more on the paradise she had left in India. Presently she returned to Guy's photo, again held it a long time in her hand, and finally exclaimed, "If Guy had kept faithful to me, I would now have rewarded him!"

CHAPTER XXX.

MADAME SERAPHINA.

What was it that made me shudder as Julia departed from my sight? Was it simply the instinctive aversion of natures that never could amalgamate? or was it a lingering jealousy of the old dead love, which always leaves a latent pang behind? Was it, perchance, the presentiment that the fair mischief would work woe to those I cherished? perhaps sow tares in the garden of their lives, that might over-run and make it a wilderness.

I felt a deeper depression after this meeting with Julia Darrel, for so I must still call her,

than I had known for a long time. Alas, how weak is humanity! and I, poor lonely woman, was weakest among the weak.

- "First floor's compliments, if you please, ma'am," said my landlady, handing me a ticket on staring yellow paper, "First floor's compliments, ma'am, and hope you'll be at 'er lecture."
 - "Her lecture?"
- "Yes, ma'am, her lecture on Slavery; it isn't far, only at the Instituotion."
 - "Can I go there alone?"
- "Oh, yes, ma'am; you'll excuse me, but you don't look very young."
 - "True, I don't."
- "And there 's nothing very-very particular in-"
- "In my appearance, that is also true. I dare say a quiet, plain little body like me may go anywhere unobserved. It is far more the loneliness of one's own feelings," I went on murmuring to myself, rather than addressing my landlady, but I awoke from my fit of abstraction, and sent my

compliments and thanks to Madame Seraphina, as civil as I could make them, fully resolving to improve the opportunity of hearing her. The subject of her lecture was to be Slavery; on that topic I was pretty well read, and, like most women, had very strong convictions; of course I expected to hear them strengthened, not controverted.

The hall was neither very large nor very well lit, the audience was thinly scattered on the benches. Madame Seraphina was already seated on the platform when I entered. She was a tall, stout woman, with manly features and a very red face; her appearance rendered more decidedly masculine by short, cropped hair, parted on one side, and frizzed out in a bush. She certainly wore a petticoat, but when seated, or standing behind the table on the platform, which effectually concealed her skirts, she showed a costume much like a loose, dark coat, a very white shirt front, and a black neck-tie.

Madame Seraphina's large hand rested on a voluminous bundle of papers, and one finger was adorned with a large gold ring; it was the fore-finger of the right hand. Had a slender gold hoop encircled the third finger of her left, would the poor lady have been in the glare of gas on the platform, in almost manly attire, about to do man's work? The happy wife or mother would have had no time to do anything more active in the anti-slavery cause than to give her mite to help the work, or to make a few comfortable garments to clothe the helpless sufferers from man's injustice.

Perhaps poor Madame Seraphina was one of those unloved women, of whom God grant there may be few, who stand quite alone on the ocean of life, with no tender ties or family bonds to fill their hearts; women who have no husband, nor father for whom to cherish a bright, cheerful home and a smiling face; no old mother in an easy chair by the fire-side, to tend and watch

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and pray for, no brother, sister, or friend to hope and struggle with, no young children to teach or work for. For all these reasons, perhaps, Madame Seraphina was doing man's work; and strong energies and strong feelings, failing their natural bent, had sought a strange one, and thus we were to hear a timid woman's lips grow eloquent on the already worn subject of the wrongs of the coloured races; wrongs deadly true, but, alas, would this strange advocate of a good cause aid its progress, or cast an air of ridicule on the theme, and make things sacred and holy, the jest and scoff of the heartless? The idea of that woman's loneliness haunted me, and when I looked at her I felt at once sorrowful and ashamed!

Not thus felt Madame Seraphina. She coughed, rose, and bowed, bowed like a man; made a second kind of salutation with her large hand, shook back her hair, and addressed us in a full, sonorous voice, which, with a little modulation,

might have been very musical. I have retained a good deal of the lecture, it began nearly as follows:—

"Ladies and gentlemen,—I am—(a pause)—a person of few words; I will waste none that I can help on the subject on which I am about to address you.

"We are all familiar with the name of alavery; slavery the true curse that fell upon the earth when man fell! Many noble efforts have been made for the suppression of slavery, many noble sacrifices—all honour be to the men—the persons I mean, who have made them. But may it not be stated with incontestable, unanswerable truth, that while serfdom permeates every class of mankind, one race alone, the coloured, has excited or obtained the sympathy of men, of—I should say, philanthropists.

"Probably, nay certainly, the most universally oppressed being in creation, the most utterly prostrate—the most trampled upon, is—woman!

What champion, I ask, has arisen in her cause? Who has lifted a voice, held out a hand, to lift her from the dust in which the cruel selfishness of man has cast her? Has he not kept her down, planting the iron heel of oppression on her neck? What has earth to offer to woman but a crown of thorns, pressed on an aching brow? Ah! I see smiles, I hear symptoms of derisive laughter; speak! Contradict me if you can, -if you dare! I ask again, what has earth to give woman but a crown of thorns! She is a being like yourselves; your equal, your superior—(you smile again!) a being cast in a finer mould, with more delicate perceptions, more exalted views, more energy; into what have you degraded her?-into a wife, a mother—a cook—a nurse! Yes, a wife to be oppressed and trampled on; a mother, to labour till she faints under her burden; a cook to minister to your low, sensual appetites; a nurse to wait on your sickly fancies! Behold what you have made of the glory of creation!

"Look upon the picture I have drawn, look and blush, if you have not outlived all sense of shame and degradation. Blush, tyrant; blush and tremble, for your slave will awake and burst her bonds; then woe to the oppressor!"

Here an unmistakable laugh arose in one part of the assembly, while a slight hiss was beginning to be heard. The female part of the audience looked, some amused, some perplexed. A few feeble claps from personal friends of the lecturer here broke in, but they were not enough to drown the expressions of disapprobation or derision.

The bold lecturer visibly grew paler, her breath was short, she took some water with a trembling hand, and sat down.

The little tumult subsided, and encouraged by the few claps, the nods and smiles of her slender band of supporters, Madame Seraphina once more arose, and proceeded with her lecture. It was not so bold, not quite so defiant, but she went into very minute details of numerous wrongs inflicted on woman, from her refusal of political suffrage, down to her condemnation to the drudgery of a wife and mother.

Some few of Madame Seraphina's remarks, which bore a resemblance to truth, were rendered mere caricatures, by the ridiculous colouring with which she painted them.

Ah! had any vague thoughts of female emancipation ever wandered through the airy cells of a woman's brain, had she heard Madame Seraphina's lecture on the wrongs of her sex, such thought must have been for ever put to flight.

When, after three hours' listening wonder, I came forth into the night air, the rain was falling fast and heavily;—the clock struck eleven.

I felt lonely, and rather helpless, I must own, and stood irresolute on the door step, when some unseen person said to me, "There are no cabs to be had, allow me to offer you an umbrella."

Before I could reply, an umbrella was placed in my hand, and the speaker was lost in the darkness of the night. I reached my lodgings in time to hear Madame Seraphina loudly reproaching my landlady for having neglected the cooking of some peculiarly prepared dish, which her soul longed for, for supper.

CHAPTER XXXI.

RACHEL PONDERS ON A MATTER BEYOND HER
POWERS, AND RECEIVES NEWS FROM HER OLD
WORLD AT WARFORD.

I GAZED with more intent eyes than ever into the fire pictures that night, and the clock struck one, two, two, three even, before the procession of images that arose in my brain had glided or tramped through its cells. I saw portraits of women under pretty nearly every condition of life, from the first fair woman in Eden, unstained and unfallen, able and willing to say to her husband from her heart, "God is thy law, thou mine!" to the so-called strong-minded woman I had but lately heard, vehemently contending

for her sisters' emancipation. I remembered my own mother, who had ever been to me the model of womanhood, devoting life and energy and strength to husband, child, and home, never stepping beyond the limits of household duties, unless to perform some act of kindness and charity, with tenderness and noiseless steps; a being ever gentle and loving, but withal firm, above all vanities, with a character that might have stood a graceful column on a hill, yet was content to live lowly in the valley, serving God and man. She possessed talent—its best rudder common sense—a rare energy of will and purpose; perchance she might have made some noise in the world with such endowments,-might have won some sort of notoriety, but she had lived and died nothing more than the matchless wife and mother, and the poor man's friend. Was I to count this beautiful life a failure? Had my mother lived her nobly-filled years utterly in vain? or had her quiet passage on earth, like the soft,

noiseless showers, left the soil she had walked over richer and holier?

Had God truly made man and woman to pursue the same bold and laborious career, mentally and physically? Had this rule of nature been lost sight of from the hour of creation until now? Had every woman, who had not hardily pursued an adventurous path, turned as a coward from her true vocation? If woman was to go forth in the open arena of the world, and there to strive for the highest manly prizes earth can give, who would be the mothers of our coming heroes? Who would rear their tender physical frames? At whose knee would they stand to learn their first lessons of love and life, while the best and ablest women would be engaged in the active warfare of the world? Where would the soft. hand be found to lay its blessing on young, unharnessed boyhood?

Verily, it might suffice the ambition of the proudest woman to be the mother of the great man—to give him physical and mental life, to

watch the first gleams of his genius, to nurture them into strength and beauty. Would not she sacrifice much, who gave up this reality, or even the hope of this reality, to struggle blindly in the battle of life?

And the wife of the great man, where would she be found? She who should be to him as his soul's conscience, his prompter, guide, inspirer and best reward?

Could the strong Amazon, in the glare of flashing arms, be all this? No, truly; and in our woman's ranks so many would be found quite incapable of any ambition beyond that of happiness. Surely those who will be men are few, and must make a little Thermopylæ to themselves; they will not find enough of their sex to form a phalanx against the enemy.

Who would willingly march against a fee who had father, brother, or husband in their ranks?

Man will not consent to share his work with woman, and what woman who has known the holy tenderness of a father, the protection of a loving brother, or a husband's fostering love, would unfurl a banner of defiance against their cause!

These crude thoughts jostled each other in my brain, as I still gazed on the fire pictures. came an opposition force trooping up. I began to fear that my feelings, and not my reason, had been talking; perhaps it was only cowardice that made it seem a sad, shocking thing to me, for a woman to talk boldly on a platform, or fight as a soldier, and live as the comrade of rough men in a camp, or sail the ocean among hardy seamen, or force her sickened soul into some frightful theatre of anatomy. Perhaps it was my own littleness of mind, or feebleness of character, that made me shudder at these things. Perchance if there were no women of stronger mould than I, we should all degenerate into feeble little child-wives, like poor Alice, or, infinitely worse, into vain, selfish coquettes, like Julia Darrel

What was the conclusion to be drawn? then

passed through my poor, puzzled head, the colossal statues of the great women of earth, the Semiramises, the Catherines, the Elizabeths, and the numbers of lesser lights, yet too brilliant to be hid from mankind. I thought of the kingly, patriotic Elizabeth at Tilbury, the inspired and tender Pucelle, of the land of the lilies, in her clanking armour, and then under the rustle of green branches where she sat judging the people, Deborah arose a mother, and strong ruler in Israel, and drove away the younger phantoms. I thought of the many women who had borne rule openly, and, many as they were, I weighed them against the women who had quietly swayed the world since its foundation, by a word, a look, a tear, and I asked which were the most real sovereigns? I heard counsel on both sides, but I could not solve the matter.

Just then I heard a struggling sob, it came through thin lath and plaster, straight from the heart of the strong-minded lecturer? Was it that the unmanly hisses she had lately heard were still echoing in her ears? or, was she weeping over some sad wrong in the dead past, which had warped her woman's nature? Still the sob came to me as a revelation that the life of the platform was not happiness in this individual case, whatever it might be in others.

The opposing processions of battlers, for and against female emancipation, clashed, the white ashes smothered the fire pictures, and I went to bed to pursue the debated question in sleep, if I The next morning brought a letter from could. "Julia had written to ask Guy for his Alice. photograph, in remembrance of old times." Alice had shed many bitter tears. Guy was very cross, never at home when he could help it. Alice had no heart to look after her house, or even to mind her baby; baby was ill, perhaps it was teething; did I know what was best to do for children teething? The one solitary maid was dirty and idle, she did not seem to know her work, and Alice could not teach her. She could not send her away, she had changed every

month, and through turned-off servants, who had told so many stories, the place had got a bad name, and no one else would come. The dinners were badly cooked, Guy would not eat them, and sometimes went away fasting to the office; it was not Alice's fault? How should a girl brought up as a lady know anything of cooking? Heaven knew how she had wept—morning, noon, and night. Then Guy brought home so little money; everything went wrong, would I lend her ten pounds? and not tell Guy? he would never forgive her, and the money would all be returned directly Tom sent some from Australia: he would be sure to send some day.

Nobody could reproach Alice with her extravagant dresses now; she never went out, she did not care how she dressed. But men are so unreasonable. Guy, who had complained of her spending too much on clothes, now scolded her for not keeping herself nice; forgetting that she had nothing to wear, and cared for nothing. Guy's heart had, no doubt, gone back to his first

love, and she, Alice, would die of a broken heart, just as they do in novels. Oh, if sister Rachel would only come home! she would set everything right, Guy would listen to her, would mind her."

Poor Alice wound up thus: "Oh, do come, Rachel, do come! it is all quite true that Mrs. Belton, and this wretched, wicked Warford do slander you, and say you are too fond of Guy, but you know that I am not a bit jealous of you, and never should be, for I know that it is quite impossible that there could ever be any lovemaking between you and Guy; and if I don't mind what Warford says, why should you mind I asked Guy the other day if you need mind it, and he got quite cross, and only answered, 'Pshaw!' I dare say he was thinking of that wicked Julia all the while. Do you know, Rachel, it all seems to me like a story in a book? You know there always is a wicked woman that tries to make the real heroine wretched, but then it always comes right in the

end. Do you think the story of my life will ever come right?" &c., &c., &c.

As I closed Alice's letter, my eye fell on a strange umbrella. I had a vague notion that I must find an owner for it. I was thinking this, and crushing the letter in my hand, wickedly wishing for the moment, that I could so crush Warford, when my landlady entered with an immense card, and the words, "Second floor's compliments, and if you've quite done with his umbrella—and first floor sends you this card."

"The umbrella?"

"Yes, it was 'im as lent you the umbrella last night."

Madame Seraphina's card contained an illuminated invitation to a conversazione on the following evening; the subject to be discussed was "the emancipation of woman!"

Alas! alas! what was woman's emancipation to me? Would it take from me the burden of slander and sorrow that pressed on my heart!

CHAPTER XXXII.

MADAME SERAPHINA'S DRAWING ROOM.

About twenty-five ladies had assembled in Madame Seraphina's drawing room, all more or less eccentric in appearance and manner, all more or less sad, disappointed-looking women, who had known life only in its bitterness.

Five only were married women, and several of those, I afterwards learnt, were on bad terms with their husbands.

The assembly was completed by three gentlemen. One of them was a little bald man in spectacles, who acted as Madame Seraphina's trumpeter, and devoured considerable quantities of her toast, cake, &c.; his name was Simon

Sykes. The second was a tall, stout, solemn individual, whose vocation appeared to be to listen, with closed eyes and folded hands, and just at the right moment to open his eyes, unfold his hands, stare, clap, and exclaim, "Bravo! excellent!"

I learnt that Mr Sykes was considered a sort of autumnal admirer of Madame Seraphina's, who might have actually gone the length of proposing in form, had Madame Seraphina been a little more explicit, or confidential on the subject of her regular income; he had been a lawyer, but, for some reasons unstated, had given up practice.

Mr. Simpkins, his rival, had been something also, which he was no more—to wit, a preacher, who, finding no congregation, and consequently no emolument, had given up a calling of which he was utterly unworthy, and lived he best knew how himself. Meanwhile he had no objection to form part of Madame Seraphina's court, and eat of the crumbs let fall by the more favoured Mr Sykes.

The third gentleman present was surely a spectator, rather than a participator in the scene; he was none other than my poet, my umbrellalender; in my landlady's language, "Second Floor."

I felt confused, awkward, and countrified, as the most rustic of country cousins; and the worst of all was, that I became suddenly conscious of a great wish to please, and as despairingly certain that I was a poor, ugly, little dowdy, who would go through life unloved and unnoticed, as I had hitherto been. I forgot all about the supposed purport of my visit, forgot who the fat-faced lady was, who stamped across the room with as much noise as a dragoon would have made, when she received me. I forgot my troubles, shame, and vexations in the past, and began to dream, madly, wildly, like a silly girl, and then to be bitterly angry with myself for my own folly. Still, it was impossible for me to yield to the temptation of going backwards into

the wall, and I must perforce advance, and meet the welcome of my hostess.

She was a kind-hearted woman; benevolence was her natural character, had not the world or circumstances, warped it from its true bent.

She saw that I was uncomfortable and confused, and hastened to my relief. Everything swam around me. "This is yours, I think," said the poet, bowing low, as he handed me my fan, which I had dropped in my confusion. His smile was beautiful, or so it seemed to me, poor savage, who had just sprung from my solitude of Warford, wherein if I had ever seen any of earth's jewels, it had been in the rough state. Now this poet had passed through the lapidary's hands, and was finely polished; for despite careless attire, he had an unspeakable air of elegance and refinement.

Madame Seraphina led me to a seat on the other side of the room, and devoted herself to me for half an hour, explaining her own views, while sounding my principles, and endeavouring to impress on my mind the holiness and beauty of "our cause," as she called it.

She had a remarkable command of language, a great deal of quickness in perception, a clever trick of illustrating her meaning; but she was one-sided in her way of looking at an object, and absolutely deaf to the least word that could be urged against her theories. Despite her manly tendencies, she had a most womanly way of saying, "It is, because it is," or "I know it, because I know it;" or, again, "I feel a conviction, and I always find my convictions right." I heard once more the old story, that "woman was trampled upon;" and as I looked round upon that poor, melancholy assembly, I was almost inclined to think that some one really had illused them. They had all sat down to the banquet of life, and found empty cannisters, and dry goblets; or dust and ashes, where fruit and wine should have been.

Madame Seraphina repeated again that "woman must find her sphere!"

- "She must, she shall find it!" echoed a dozen shrill voices.
- "Bravo!" cried Sykes and Simpkins, simultaneously.
- "She must struggle out of the obscurity of hermental prison;" continued Madame Seraphina. "She must shake off her intellectual fetters."
- "She must shake them off," said the chorus, rustling their silks with agitation, while Sykes and Simpkins uttered the well-concerted "Bravo!"
- "May I bring you a cup of tea?" asked the poet; adding in a low voice, "you, I think, are not intellectual?"
- "Intellectual!" I exclaimed, impetuously, "nay, I fear I am an idiot!" and I spoke aloud. "You are young," said Madame Seraphina; "your mind requires enlarging and directing, my dear."

Not twenty words passed between the poet and me, yet it seemed to me that I had known him a long time. With a simplicity that did honour to

my country education, I was impressed with the idea that he must be a great man, as well as an author, endowed with all the noble and heroic virtues, as well as with transcendant genius. Do not despise me, reader. I, poor little Rachel Arden, had never seen a verse-maker till then. I wished—oh, how I wished!—that I had known him before; known him in the earlier morning of life, made of him the shrine of my secret devotion. I was sure I should have felt ennobled by such worship; and even, in sadness and in sorrow, might have preserved my self-respect. All my surroundings that evening would have jarred my feelings, like harsh discords in the divine music of life, but for the presence of the first man of remarkable ability that I had ever known.

The more than plain—the actually repulsive faces around me, the melancholy litter and disorder rather affected by Madame Seraphina than absolutely natural to her, being, from her point of view, the best evidence of talent and origi-

nality, and the proper concomitant of literature, all this was peculiarly distasteful to me; but a strain of harmony pervaded the atmosphere, and softened down all that was painful, while Warburton Elmore sat near. And yet he was very silent that evening, though his countenance was eloquent; when I dared to break through the sort of awe with which he inspired me and glanced towards him, I was momentarily quite happy.

Reader! friend! I tell you all my follies! The past, you see, had taught me nothing; my schooling had been rough; one fall over a giddy height had not sufficed to sober me. Here I was again looking over a precipice, already giddy from gazing below, yet fascinated on the brink, from which I saw spread before me a paradise of flowers and sunshine. In vain a warning voice within me whispered, "Those flowers grow not for thee; that sunshine will be to thee a will-owisp. If the playmate of thy childhood, the companion of thy girlhood, passed by thy warmbeating heart, unmoved—he with no pretensions

beyond his fellows, thy friend and equal, if he continued cold as marble to thee, who would have died for him, wilt thou move, by thy silent unspeaking love, this higher nature, that daily, hourly, converses with forms and creatures of undying beauty? What could little Rachel ever be to this man, who had but to close his eyes to conjure up such wonderful visions, as would dazzle her own weak sight into blindness?"

Thus spoke Reason, but Will whispered, "Why not struggle for a place in the festival of life?" and fancy sighed, "After all, this is only heroworship! and is not hero-worship as natural to pure souls, as light to innocent eyes?"

I was not in love, but upon the brink, perhaps, and disposed to forget my great sorrows and little vexations, and to walk straightway into the enchanted regions of dreamland.

The more I began to stumble in my dim visions, the more consciously ugly, awkward and uninteresting I became. That mattered little beyond my own discomfort, and happily no one

knew which way my thoughts were tending. Madame Seraphina only saw in me a possible convert, and a new subscriber to "The Association for breaking the Chains of the Enslaved Daughters of England." Her guests were one and all occupied with themselves primarily, and secondly with the speculations naturally suggested by two such attractive beings as Messrs. Sykes and Simpkins; it was evident that they were considered infinitely superior to the poet, who beyond the silent deference of listening intently to, and never contradicting any fair speaker, was not particularly attentive to any. Again, what did He told me afterwards that he he there? wanted a new scene for a novel, but his heart failed him, for he was a man of soft feelings, and of compassionate nature; he stopped short in holding up to ridicule women who had, perchance, been distorted from their true nature, by the burden of the cross which life had lain upon This was gentle charity in Elmore; perchance I should imitate it, and wipe out the few

harsh words I have already written and half repented of, but woman is not very pitiful to her sisters, and the phase of life brought before me thus, of the strong-minded woman's existence, is very tempting to my pen. Alas! what a coming down from lofty regions of heroic visions was it, when I remembered the very common-place loan of an umbrella on the preceding evening, and that I must say "Thank you" for it to Mr. Elmore. I do not know how I managed to bring out the words, but I did succeed, and he answered with a sort of benevolent air, as if he were speaking to a very young person, that he "was pleased to have done me a little service."

It positively seemed strange to me that a poet should be spoken to about such a common-place thing as an umbrella, a mere umbrella. It seemed stranger still that he should eat sandwiches and drink wine, and even laugh at a silly joke of Mr. Sykes', and, above all, that he should ask my opinion of "Hyperion."

Now he was a true Hyperion to me, though he

did smoke cigars, and the landlady took the liberty of calling him "Second Floor."

Shall I go on with my foolish story? Shall I tell how that evening's casual meeting with Warburton Elmore, changed the whole course of my life and feelings—my life that had been spent in a lowly valley, now lifted on the hill-tops, and bathed in rosy and golden sunlight.

END OF VOL. I.

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